

hold me closer, necromancer

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hold me closer, necromancer

by [oceans_song](#)

Summary

He arrived in Death still kneeling, and caught his shijie's spirit as it began to float past. Gathering her back up into his arms, he held her spirit to him as closely as he did her body in Life.

The Dead he had summoned began to slowly surround him and he stood, struggling under the extra weight, though his shijie was small and slight.

She opened her eyes at the motion, and though nightmares encircled them, she did not look afraid.

“A-Xian,” she breathed, and smiled.

In which Wei Wuxian, talented necromancer, Yiling Patriarch, Lord of the Dead, doesn't let half his family die in his arms.

Notes

A mix of book and show canon. This fic is using the magic system of the Old Kingdom series, and its system of Death. However, all that is explained in text, and in most other areas I stick quite close to MDZS canon, so don't worry if you haven't read Sabriel ☺ Title from the novel, “Hold Me Closer, Necromancer” by Lish McBride.

Mostly finished, I'll be updating quite quickly. Please leave comments and kudos if you enjoyed ♥

if you're gonna flirt with death, be prepared to put a ring on it

His body was still warm. Wen Ning kept throwing him little glances, guilt twisted in his mouth, fear of an explosion in the wary tightness of his eyes. But Wei Wuxian felt as though he'd already spent every emotion he had to give. His home had been invaded, his adopted parents murdered, and his brother taken.

He had been looking for him when he'd infiltrated Lotus Pier for his brother, had convinced Wen Ning and Wen Qing to help him, but Jiang Cheng wasn't here. Only his corpse.

Attempt the impossible, thrummed through his head like the vibration from a zither.

Wei Wuxian looked up from where he was kneeling, Jiang Cheng's body cradled in his arms. Wen Qing didn't catch his eye - she was looking over the lake, jaw and fists clenched. Giving him a moment with his grief, Wei Wuxian thought, almost hysterically, and didn't consider that perhaps she was indulging her own.

"Wen Qing," he said to catch her attention, and flinched slightly when his voice cracked. She looked at him, her eyes devoid of judgement. He cleared his throat and tried again. "Wen Qing, I know you are a healer, and a Charter mage, first and foremost." She nodded, her eyes sharpening. "But I also know that you can't have grown up in the Wen Sect without learning some Free Magic spells."

Her jaw tightened further. "Where is this going?"

"His body is still warm," he said, hating how his voice turned pleading. "He can't have moved past the First Gate. Help me enter Death and I could —"

"Wei Wuxian!" she interrupted, voice freezing. "You are no necromancer. There is no way you can go into Death, take one of their own, and return unscathed."

"I have been in Death before," he replied stubbornly. His hand rested on his brother's chest, where Wei Wuxian's golden Charter marks had already sewn shut the fatal wound. "I know the principles. Please, time is running out. Help me, or I will attempt to enter myself."

Wei Wuxian did, indeed, know the principles. But only as concepts from books, and as impossibly distant memories, lessons from his mother. All he had been taught since Jiang Fengmian had taken him in off the streets was pure, unsullied Charter Magic.

Wen Qing must have known this. But she looked down at the stubborn set of his mouth, at the desperate way his hands fisted the bloodied front of his brother's robes, and saw that there would be no dissuading him.

"The other sects would execute you if they found out about this," she said, a combination of resignation and grief in her eyes, but knelt beside them with no further comment, red robes pooling around her, boat rocking gently. "Wen Ning," she said sharply, looking up at him so she wouldn't see the relief and gratitude on Wei Wuxian's face. "Keep watch."

He nodded quickly, and, after a glance at Wei Wuxian, looked away, mouth settling into a gentle sadness.

“You know the words?” Wen Qing asked, taking his hands brusquely. He nodded. They closed their eyes, and let the Free Magic blister off their tongues, hot and wild and burning.

Wen Qing pulled her hands away abruptly as Wei Wuxian’s started to freeze against her, crystals forming elegantly over his robes, his face, catching in his hair and filming over it. An icy white cloud billowed out from him, and Wen Qing rubbed her shoulders in an attempt to ward off the chill as she rose to stand next to her brother. The burns on her lips made an odd counterpoint to the cold. Wen Ning stood solidly beside her, his warmth welcome.

“Will he find him, do you think?”

Wen Qing rubbed her arms again rather than give in to her urge to shiver. “I’d say there’s about a fifty per cent chance. Whether either of them come back unchanged...” she trailed off, and Wen Ning didn’t press her. They stood together, silent sentinels against the rest of their sect.

A thin whistle puffed out from between Wei Wuxian’s frozen lips, too faint for either of them to hear.

The current felt almost too strong for Wei Wuxian in his current state of exhaustion, the water icy and powerful against his shins. He stumbled, wetting his robes up to his waist, but righted himself quickly before the hungry tide could drag him under. The water was always hungry, in Death. The ends of his robes floated out around him, black against grey in this colourless world, and the rest clung uncomfortably to his thighs as he began to wade forward, the sound muffled and dull. The only other sound was the roaring of the water through to the Second Gate.

To call out would be to invite the attention of the Dead, or worse. But a body in the water would be easy to miss, in this grey light. If he missed his brother going beyond the First Gate because he was too afraid to make a noise...

The mists of the First Gate came into view, and Wei Wuxian felt his heart leap in his chest as he made out a dark, upright figure against the grey falls, outline rough and unfinished. The figure turned towards him, slowly, and seemed to catch sight of him. Wei Wuxian’s lungs filled with dread. The creature, too massive to be anything close to human, looked at him with eyes that burned with the marsh lights of Death.

He drew his sword. Charter Magic may not have worked in Death, but a cultivator’s sword was made to kill that which was already Dead. Suibian had already sent untold Dead creatures back into Death, and Wei Wuxian was confident it could do the same to this one.

The Dead creature laughed, a high screech, and turned to face him fully. There was something clutched in its arms, Wei Wuxian noticed suddenly, human shaped and limp, and he felt determination blaze up within him like a bonfire as he recognised his brother.

“Another little cultivator?” the creature said, its voice gating and high pitched, a screech of metal against metal. “And this one’s even still alive! Still so bright and shiny.”

It grinned, its mouth stretching grotesquely wide, full of teeth and fire and shadows. “Must be my lucky day.”

It started towards Wei Wuxian, and though his grip tightened on Suibian in preparation, he made no other move. He was wary of making the creature drop Jiang Cheng. They were still so close to the First Gate...

His mind raced for a solution even as the creature lunged at him. He stepped around the lunge, neatly, quickly, his body reacting to the fight automatically from his training. He brought Suibian up in retaliation, swiping at the creature’s back viciously. The dead flesh parted with a squelch, revealing the marsh fires below, and the creature roared.

I wish Lan Zhan was here, Wei Wuxian thought a little wistfully, as the creature turned with inhuman speed to claw at him. *With his zither we could bind him, get him to release Jiang Cheng and —*

He almost froze as the thought occurred to him, and only his training prevented the creature from tearing his face off. As it was, he brought Suibian up just in time, and the creature’s hand closed around the sword, heedless of the spelled blade digging into its dead flesh. With an enormous heave, it wrenched Suibian from his grip. Wei Wuxian stumbled back, the current pulling enticingly around his legs. He thought of Lan Zhan’s zither again. What had the notes of Binding sounded like again?

The creature’s rotting lips pulled back again in its parody of a smile as it held aloft Suibian. Then, with little ceremony, it threw the sword behind it, back towards the gate, and advanced again on Wei Wuxian. The sound of the waterfall increased abruptly as the sword vanished into the Second Precinct.

Wei Wuxian stumbled back again, then, growing tired of that, planted his feet against the current. The Dead creature advanced, but Wei Wuxian did not move. He stared straight up into the holes where its eyes should have been, that were filled instead with fire and hunger.

“That’s my brother you’re holding. And that means that today really *isn’t* your lucky day, because he’s coming back with me.”

The creature started to laugh again, but was cut off with a whistle. Wei Wuxian whistled again, a strong, clean note, high and soaring like a bird, and then another and another, a whole flock of notes blurring into a harsh, eerie melody.

The creature listened, its eyes wide, the fires dimming until they were barely embers, glow obscured by the black. Then it moved, lumbering past the whistling Wei Wuxian, right to the border of Life and Death. It knelt, the river rushing up to its waist, and pushed Jiang Cheng’s spirit through the boundary. It vanished, but Wei Wuxian’s whistling did not abate - the melody reversed, became almost cheerful, akin to a jig, and the creature stood, grey water sluicing down its flesh. It marched back towards the gate, its steps in time with the tune. It appeared utterly bewitched by the music, fires dull in its vacant eyes.

But as it passed Wei Wuxian it gave a desperate lunge. The whistling brought its feet out from under it and it was swept under, the river accepting its surrender greedily. It had, however, accomplished its purpose. Wei Wuxian stumbled away from its lunge, and the grey river dragged him down too. He kept whistling even as his head went under, icy water filling his mouth, his lungs. The waterfalls of the First Gate roared, once, twice, as the creature and Wei Wuxian passed through.

Jiang Cheng heaved in a breath, and Wen Qing and Wen Ning whirled around, eyes wide. He stayed where he was, almost immobilised by ice in his brother's arms, but his chest moved with deep, frantic breaths.

Making up for lost time, Wen Qing thought, then brushed that aside, kneeling quickly beside the pair and taking Jiang Cheng's wrist in her hand.

Wen Ning continued poling down the river and away from Lotus Pier, but watched them with an open mouth. Wen Qing looked up at him, her eyes still wide with shock and relief.

"There's a pulse. He's alive." She touched two fingers briefly to his forehead, and his Charter mark flared beneath them. She breathed a sigh of relief. "And uncorrupted."

His tanned skin was still deathly pale, still icy, his eyes still closed, but he breathed. Wen Qing manoeuvred him out of the ice, taking him, with a slight pang of worried guilt, from Wei Wuxian's arms. But he did not move to take him back, frozen solid, still.

She lay Jiang Cheng at the other end of the boat, covering him in the only blanket, and checked him over. Wei Wuxian had already healed his wounds, so there was little else she could do for the moment. She chafed his hands and arms gently, and felt as he warmed, slowly, back to the temperature of the living. The siblings both took turns glancing at the still, ice encrusted form of Wei Wuxian. He gave no sign he noticed, as frozen as a carved statue, the ice encasing him turning him silver in the moonlight.

When they reached the Yiling Supervisory Office, Wen Qing was finally able to treat Jiang Cheng with proper medicine. For Wei Wuxian, however, she could do nothing. After a day went by, then two, then three, they stopped looking for his return, and hid him away. They both knew that there was no coming back from Death after this long, not unchanged.

Jiang Cheng woke after three days, alive and pale and healthy, and set off in search of his family.

The war against the Wen Sect began in earnest. Wei Wuxian remained, to the wider world, missing.

To Wen Qing and Wen Ning he remained hidden, frozen still.

Until one day, three months later, Wen Ning went to check on him, and found him gone.

all that pain, all that suffering, and it just made him fucking furious

Chapter Notes

This chapter closely follows the corresponding scenes from the book and show, and is pretty graphic in places. Trigger warnings in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

When rumours of a necromancer attacking the Wen Supervisory Offices began to spread, they were met with a great deal of doubt, fear, and confusion. The fear was the fear every citizen of the Old Kingdom felt at the mention of a necromancer. They were almost universally loathed, people of Free Magic who worked in Death, where none were meant to travel. Who enslaved the peaceful dead, and who terrorised the living.

Cultivation existed to keep the Dead down, and necromancers raised them up. There was no doubt in anyone's mind of which path the righteous walked.

So it was to the surprise of many, then, that when the cultivation sects began to band together against the corruption of the Wen Sect and their dictator, Wen Ruohan, this evil did not side directly with the other.

And yet, time went on, and the number of Supervisory Offices found torn open, piles of bodies on the ground, ripped apart by Hands, or worse, only increased.

Lan Wangji and Jiang Cheng were among the first to find such a scene. After allying together in a surprise attack against the Wen Sect two months before, they were now at the forefront of the campaign against them. They were also united, unbeknownst to Jiang Cheng, in their quest for information on the whereabouts of Wei Wuxian.

Hoping to find and interrogate Wen Chao, their main lead, and the spoilt and unstable son of Wen Ruohan, they arrived at the compound of the Supervisory Office together, leading a mixture of each of their sect's disciples.

It was night, and the moon hung low and heavy in the sky. The first indication they had that something wrong was the gate. The heavy iron gates had been twisted off their hinges, and the protective Charter marks that covered them were still and dead. Jiang Cheng reached out and swiped a finger over one of the dark, glistening patches covering them. His finger came back red. He shared a grim look with Lan Wangji.

Naked blades aloft, they stepped gingerly through the gates, and felt the overwhelming buzz of Free Magic settling heavy in the air around them. Dead bodies carpeted the ground, red blood on red robes, a nauseating sight. But it was the acrid tang of recent necromancy that

brought the bile bubbling up in their stomachs and the taste of vomit to the backs of their tongues. One of the Jiang disciples stepped through the gates and promptly threw up, and the rest, pale and sweaty, looked like they wanted to emulate her.

Around the wall, runes had been drawn atop the dead Charter Marks in the cultivators' blood.

Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji shared another look. Perhaps if the taste of Free Magic hadn't lain so foul on his tongue Jiang Cheng would have rejoiced to see his enemies, members of the sect that had killed his parents, laid so low.

But he, like every cultivator, had been baptised in the Charter, had been raised to fight the Dead and Free Magic constructs, and had come to loathe and fear necromancers with every fibre of his being.

This necromancer may have been an arrow pointed at the heart of his enemy, but Jiang Cheng held no doubt that they were an enemy to him, too.

Lan Wangji picked his way across the courtyard, dark eyes sweeping the ground and walls keenly. He managed this, somehow, without getting a drop of blood on his elegant, pristine white robes.

Jiang Cheng followed, less gracefully. "The work of a necromancer, obviously, and his veritable hoard of Dead Hands."

"More than just Hands," Lan Wangji stated, eyes on a grievously charred corpse next to him.

Jiang Cheng clenched his jaw and nodded. Together they strode into the house. It was emptier than the courtyard outside, but there were still a number of bodies. Most notably, in a large, opulent bedroom, a woman's had been hung, dangling from her neck. The whip that held her twisted slowly around, again and again, and her body with it.

Jiang Cheng gave a bitter laugh as he recognised Wang LingJiao. The girlfriend of Wen Chao, she had been among the opening force that had taken over Lotus Pier. Jiang Cheng had been forced to watch as she encouraged his mother to whip Wei Wuxian bloody, then, later, as she laughed over the unmoving bodies of his parents.

"At least the victims of this particular necromancer bastard deserve it."

Lan Wangji made no comment.

Though they searched for the bodies of Wen Chao and his lackey, Wen Zhuliu, they did not find them.

"The coward probably fled crying towards daddy the second things stopped going his way. I think they'll head towards Qishan Wen."

Lan Wangji nodded, and north they went to track them down. It was an easy trail to follow, though it was the necromancer who made it so. They made of a trail of bodies, dressed in the red sun robes that marked cultivators of the Wen Sect.

At last, the pair found them. A remote courier station in the mountains, the yard around it that night was silent and empty. There was no moon.

Not wanting to alert their enemy, the two crept onto the rooftops, and, through a gap in the tiles, observed them.

It was definitely Wen Zhuliu. His face, in the faint light of the oil lamp, was the same expressionless face that Jiang Cheng remembered calmly torturing him for the amusement of Wen Chao.

But the identity of the second person in the room was less clear, for they were cloaked and hooded. The figure was curled up on a stool in the corner of the room, trembling visible even from their vantage spot.

The flame from the lantern flickered, on the verge of going out, and the figure in the corner cried out. "The lantern is going out! He's coming, he's coming!"

Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji exchanged glances. The voice was nothing like Wen Chao's smug, confident one, instead turned hoarse and reedy and afraid. But yet there was no other it could have belonged to.

"It's just the wind," Wen Zhuliu replied, but hovered next the firmly closed shutters for a moment before turning to the door.

Wen Chao made a noise that was half shriek, half moan. "And the sound of the flute? Is that the fucking wind too?" He covered his face with his hands, or attempted to, for the move revealed ten stumps where his fingers should have been.

Wen Zhuliu did not reply, but continued facing the door. Over the sound of Wen Chao beginning to hyperventilate, the pair on the roof heard it too. A high pitched, eerie tune, faint but clear, and slow, light footsteps on the stairs leading up to the room.

Jiang Cheng and Lan Wangji tightened their grips on their weapons, for crackling ahead of the footsteps came the sharp energy of Free Magic.

The music built to a crescendo, then stopped, to drift gracefully through the air like a swirl of steam. A figure rounded the corner.

He was dressed in black robes, and a slender, light flute was clutched loosely in his hand. Despite this, he did not look intimidating. He was thin, and pale, and walked slowly, like every step was an effort. Passing him in the street, one might have assumed, from the pallor underneath his naturally brown skin, and the hollows underneath his cheeks, that he was not a healthy man.

But his back, as he walked, was perfectly straight, and there was a sharp grin on his pretty, red lips.

Sharp as it was, it was nonetheless the smile that caused both their hands to slacken on their sword hilts. Both of them recognised its shape, if not the cold energy surrounding it. Both of

them would recognise Wei Wuxian's smile anywhere.

Lan Wangji's eyes widened, and Jiang Cheng's mouth dropped open. He was just about to call out when Wen Chao screamed.

"Wen Zhuliu, Wen Zhuliu, help me, help me!"

Wei Wuxian's eyebrows went up, and his cold smile widened to reveal teeth. "You still think that he will be able to save you?"

He walked a few steps, and his foot knocked against a half eaten white bun, which rolled away pathetically. Wei Wuxian looked up, and though his eyes were gleaming, his smile was gone. "What, you a picky eater now?"

Wen Chao fell from his stool, screeching "Don't make me eat it, please don't, I won't eat it, I won't eat it!" He began to crawling away, dragging his legs behind him.

As he moved, his hood fell back and his robes rucked up, revealing red and brown stained bandages covering his face and legs. The ones on his face appeared like they covered awful burns, but his legs looked even worse. Underneath the bandages, chunks of flesh seemed as if they had been carved liberally away, in some places right down to the bone.

Wei Wuxian lifted the skirts of his robes and sat neatly down on the table. His posture was easy, before he suddenly stiffened. Frost began creeping over the hand holding the pale flute. Just as suddenly though, he moved again, flicking off the crystals of ice, and looked down.

From underneath the table crawled a tiny, white corpse. It curled its arms around Wei Wuxian's leg, and stared out at Wen Zhuliu with big, glistening eyes. Wei Wuxian patted it on the head, and it brought a chubby hand to its mouth and began chewing on something with an awful crunching sound. Lan Wangji could just make out two thin and bloody things that looked an awful lot like fingers.

He stared at this pale child's corpse, and at the pale Wei Wuxian, and his grip tightened again around his sword hilt.

Wen Zhuliu stood between Wen Chao and Wei Wuxian, and returned the corpse's glare warily.

Wei Wuxian spared him a glance. "Why do you still stand between this dog and me? Do you still think you can protect him?"

"I will die trying."

"What has he ever done to deserve such loyalty?"

"I owe everything to the Wen Sect and their generosity."

Wei Wuxian's face grew even colder. "Why must the debts you owe be repaid with the suffering of others? Loyal Wen-dog! When have they ever treated you as anything other than a weapon?"

He opened his mouth to reply, but spun around as Wen Chao began to scream. Another corpse had appeared. It had once been a woman, with long dark hair and long red nails and long red robes. But her corpse was blue, and her frozen smile did not change as she ripped, with one sharp tug, the bandages, and the fragile skin of Wen Chao's burnt face and head, right off.

Blood poured down like red rain, and he collapsed into unconsciousness. Wen Zhuliu started towards him, and the child corpse lunged, sinking its teeth into his hand, and began biting chunks out of his flesh. Wen Zhuliu hit it with his other hand viciously, again and again, but it barely seemed to noticed.

The corpse of the woman, however, did. On all fours she came at him, drawing five bloody lines down Wen Zhuliu's side with her fingernails.

Assaulted on both sides, he turned back to Wei Wuxian and dived at him, fury and desperation in his normal impassive eyes.

Chapter End Notes

TW for graphic depictions of death and dead bodies, violence, torture, and implied forced cannibalism.

i miss your name inside my mouth

Chapter Notes

Again, this chapter follows the canon scene closely, and there's a fascinating way here that all the characters use formal and informal versions of each other's names to highlight their current feelings/goals. My reference for the way Chinese names work, and their words for specific relationships, was [this](#), and my reference, specifically for this scene, was [this post](#).

The two on the roof reacted. Until now they had been almost as statues, transfixed by the events happening in the room below them.

But the sight of Wei Wuxian in danger drew on both their instincts - with the swift application of Charter Marks, Lan Wangji caused the part of the roof under him to collapse. He landed upright between Wei Wuxian and Wen Zhuliu, his sword, Bichen, gleaming.

Jiang Cheng took advantage of Wen Zhuliu's shock, and his whip, Zidian, flickering lightning gold with Charter Marks, curled round his neck. It pulled him into the air with one sharp crack, and his neck broke. He dangled there, dying.

Wei Wuxian had stood swiftly as the first cracks showed in the ceiling, and moved behind the table. As his brother and Lan Wangji turned towards him, his flute already hovered over his lips.

The bodies of the woman and child moved quickly to his side, mouths open and dripping gore. They snarled at the newcomers. Wei Wuxian just looked at them, his eyes wide and opaque.

They faced each other, tense and wary, like strays in an alleyway. All was silent but for the moans of a dying man.

"What, you had time to pick up fucking necromancy," Jiang Cheng said, breaking the silence, "but you couldn't write a letter to your brother letting him know you weren't dead?"

And so saying, he strode across the gap, and pulled him into a bone crushing hug. The hug enveloped Wei Wuxian completely, and for a few moments, he stood completely still, face pale and startled over his brother's shoulder. Then his body relaxed, and his arms came up hesitantly to return the hug. His eyes didn't quite close, but he rested his thin cheek, very briefly, against Jiang Cheng's shoulder.

Lan Wangji's eyes did not leave Wei Wuxian's face. His eyes were troubled, and very sad.

Jiang Cheng slapped him on the back, and released him, muttering angrily and discreetly wiping his eyes. “Seriously, though, I’ve been looking for you everywhere. Where the fuck have you been?”

We Wuxian gave him a tight smile, then turned to sink back down onto the table once more.

“Would you believe me,” he said, looking to the side, as if the wooden table that held him was the most fascinating thing in the room, “if I said I was spirited off by a stunningly beautiful necromancer, who forced me to learn her wicked ways by day, and did other, unspeakable things to me at night?” He looked up, and turned a smirk up at his brother.

“You! Ugh, disgusting! As if any woman would even be interested in you, let alone one like that!”

The corpse of the woman shifted, and both Lan Wangji and Jiang Cheng eyed her uneasily.

Wei Wuxian laughed. “Ah, Jiang Cheng, you got me, you got me! Guess I’ll have to tell you the real story another time, eh?”

He was looking at Lan Wangji out of the corner of his eye, and Jiang Cheng instantly took his meaning. Lan Wangji might have been his ally in his search for Wen Chao, and, therefore, Wei Wuxian, but he was from a different sect. And not only that, but a sect famous for their rules and disgust of Free Magic and necromancy. Though he burned with questions, Jiang Cheng made himself nod.

“You’ll tell me as soon as we get back to Lotus Pier,” he said, and sat next to his brother, shoulder and shoulder, knee to knee. “As long as you’re back,” and he bumped his shoulder against his brother’s.

Wei Wuxian smiled, and bumped back. “I’m back,” he repeated, looking almost reverent.

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji said, stepping forward.

Wei Wuxian’s shoulders tensed, and his eyes flicked up to meet Lan Wangji’s. They looked at each other for a moment, before Wei Wuxian stood. The two of them had always been of a height, though Lan Wangji’s perfect posture often lent him an inch or two.

But standing there, face to face, Lan Wangji realised that he had to tilt his chin to meet Wei Wuxian’s eyes. Eyes which he had always before seen sparkling with mischief, or alight with laughter, or a challenge, or with fascination. They met his now, and there was no light in them at all.

“Lan er-gongzi,” he said, formal like a slap in the face, and gave a half smile, eyes in shadow and yet still very cold. “Ah, sorry, sorry, no, forgive my memory. It should be Hanguang-jun, no?” and he bowed, crisply perfect.

Lan Wangji just looked at him. “Are you the person that has been killing the Wen Sect’s disciples?”

“Of course,” he answered with a smirk, eyes half lidded.

“The necromancer.”

Wei Wuxian continued to smile.

“Why have you given up the Charter for the path of the Dead?”

Jiang Cheng frowned, and opened his mouth to defend his brother, but Wei Wuxian answered before he could, still with a half smile fixed on his face. “Does the walker choose the path, or the path choose the walker?” he said, in an almost sing-song voice. Yet the worlds held a strange wealth of hidden power.

“Answer me properly,” Lan Wangji bit out, his iron control starting to fray under the weight of Free Magic saturating the room.

“And if I don’t want to?” he replied, swiftly combative. There was a smile on his face like the one he used to wear to tease Lan Wangji when they were students together, only a few years ago. It felt to Lan Wangji, looking at the shadows in Wei Wuxian’s eyes, like a lifetime.

The Dead woman and child started to stir, but stilled when Wei Wuxian gave them a sharp glance. They moved back, reluctantly, and then started to fade, back to the shadows from where they had come.

Lan Wangji took another step forward, eyes filled with urgency, compelling and compelled. At the same time Wei Wuxian took a step back, half dance step, half flinch. His right hand, clenched behind his back from the bow, slowly uncurled. He brought it between them.

“Ah, Lan Wangji,” he said lightly, a smile on his face and a warning in his eyes. “Even if you care so little for our past friendship, you wouldn’t be so ruthless as to try and start a fight!” He cocked his head, his grin bright and glisteningly defensive. “Would you?”

Lan Wangji did not back down. “Answer me,” he said, his voice as hard and unbending as his spine, and started towards him again.

“Lan er-gongzi!” Jiang Cheng said, intervening with the hilt of his sword against Lan Wangji’s chest. But the man didn’t even seem to register the interruption, eyes locked with Wei Wuxian’s.

Wei Wuxian laughed. “You really think this is something that can be explained quickly? As if you would be swift to answer questions of the Gusu Lan Sect’s secret techniques!”

“Come back to Gusu with me,” Lan Wangji said. The two brothers blinked at him, open-mouthed.

“Me? Come to Gusu, with you? To the Cloud Recesses,” and here his open mouth morphed into a sharp grin, “the place with three thousand disciplines?” He looked Lan Wangji straight in the eye. “I like Lotus Pier better.”

Lan Wangji’s chest strained towards Wei Wuxian, and Jiang Cheng kept him back with difficulty.

Wei Wuxian looked almost triumphant, for a moment. But then his grin softened, ever so slightly. Still slightly mocking, but more gentle, he asked, “Lan Zhan, ah. What are you even trying to do?”

“Wei Ying,” Lan Wangji said, half a gasp, grasping the slim sliver of light he had glimpsed with the use of his family name like a drowning man. And, like a drowning man, he pulled it under with him. “There is a price to pay for taking the path of a necromancer.”

“I can pay.”

“Corruption could be the least of it, if it hasn’t been paid already.” His eyes flicked to the baptismal Charter mark, faint against Wei Wuxian’s forehead. “Necromancy corrupts not only one’s connection with the Charter, with Life, but harms both the body and the mind.” Then Lan Wangji’s eyes flicked back down to meet Wei Wuxian’s, and he knew before the man even opened his mouth that he had lost.

“Corruption?” Wei Wuxian’s lip curled, and his eyes glittered with fury. “Lan er-gongzi, what I use is magic, what I practice is music. Are these things also corrupted? And if they are and if I am, whether they harm my body or not, I know with greater clarity than you. As for my mind, my heart, I am the master of it. I know it best.”

“Those are all things you cannot control!”

“And can others control it for me? What business is it of theirs to try and do so?”

“Wei Wuxian!”

“Lan Wangji!”

They glared at each other, and Wei Wuxian let the anger drain slowly from his face, all the better to deliver his next line with piercing precision. “Must we argue about this? Who do you think you are to me, who does the Gusu Lan Sect think they are, to try and take me and punish me? Did you really think I wouldn’t resist?”

Lan Wangji just looked at him, mouth trembling. Jiang Cheng used the pause to intervene.

“Lan er-gongzi, we are the middle of a war and are in desperate need of forces. Wei Wuxian is on our side. Should we punish our own people?”

“That’s right! As long as the Wen-dogs are the ones killed, why care how I kill them?”

“Besides, and I apologise for my bluntness,” Jiang Cheng added, “but Wei Wuxian isn’t even from your sect. It is not the Gusu Lan Sect’s place to punish him. No matter what happens, he will not be going back with you.”

Lan Wangji’s eyes were wide and stricken, but Wei Wuxian did not look at him, instead turning to his brother to hit him on the shoulder. “Look at you, Sect Leader Jiang!”

“Fuck off,” he muttered, and they turned together to look at the corpses of Wen Chao and Wen Zhuliu.

“Lan er-gongzi?” Wei Wuxian said, over his shoulder. “Wen Chao and Wen Zhuliu have been apprehended. Surely your task is complete, and you may leave, satisfied?”

Jiang Cheng nodded at Lan Wangji, but he, too, spoke distantly. “Indeed, Lan er-gongzi, the Jiang Sect appreciates all your help, but our goal is completed. It is time for us to part.”

The brothers turned, and began speaking in low voices. Lan Wangji stood staring, frozen, at the back of Wei Wuxian for a few moments. Then he turned, and walked slowly away.

end the war for us, wei wuxian, all it'll take is your reputation

Chapter Summary

This chapter has a scene I was sad wasn't in the novel, and a scene I was sad wasn't in the show. Best of both worlds 😊

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Wei Wuxian had forgotten that his shijie loved him. He had not forgotten that he loved her, of course, but the concept of love had become strange, almost foreign, in Death. He had held onto his memory of her and Jiang Cheng so ferociously tight, had sworn awful vengeance on those that had caused their suffering, had forced himself back, through gateway after gateway, for the chance that he could assist them, that his memories of them had grown strange, warped.

He had wondered, as he and Jiang Cheng journeyed to the front lines, idle thoughts that his mind had flinched away from like a hand from a fire, whether Jiang Yanli would look at him as Lan Wangji had done. Would see through him, under the thin skin of his body, down to the darkness swirling within. Would recoil with disgust, would turn away, would be as angry as he had been.

He picked his way through the injured bodies of their allies on the ground, feeling the presence of Death all around him, Free Magic and self hatred heavy on his tongue.

Then he saw her. She knelt on the ground in her fine robes, mouth firm and eyes gentle as she assisted a wounded Nie cultivator.

He swallowed, and remembered, properly, how much he loved her, and it made opening his mouth almost impossible. His voice cracked as he said, “Shijie?”

She froze, and he felt dread rise up in his throat, to curl up his throat in an uncomfortable, fist sized lump. Then she spun, her eyes, like saucers, turning to look at him. She smiled, an incredulous thing, like she almost didn’t believe he could really be there, in front of her.

Tears, quite unexpectedly, started to flow down his face as she smiled, softer, full of relief and love. He smiled back, tremulously, and began crying even harder.

“Xian-xian,” she said, no hesitation in her voice, and tears as bright as her brother’s on her face. She stood, and hugged him.

He was taller than her, but she still managed to seem like she was wrapping him up, a protective cocoon of her arms.

Then she smiled at Jiang Cheng, whose normally hard expression was uncharacteristically gentle as he looked at them, and said, “Come,” taking Wei Wuxian’s arm and leading them both away.

Inside, she sunk to the ground, Wei Wuxian following her lead. She looked at him for a long moment, and her eyes, once again, began to flow with tears. Across from them, Jiang Cheng’s eyes did the same, like it was only now, with the siblings all together, that he had realised how much he had missed them.

“A-Xian,” she whispered, her voice achingly sad. “You’ve gotten thinner.”

His face wavered like he was going to follow his siblings’ example. “Shijie,” he said, and with his knuckle, wiped a single runaway tear from her chin. “You have too.” And in his sudden frown there were deep lines of guilt.

“Where have you been?” she asked, voice almost fearful.

He looked at her for a moment before drawing her into a hug. This one was gentler than the last, but just as protective as the one Jiang Yanli had pulled him into. Over her shoulder, his face was almost fierce. “Shijie, it doesn’t matter where I’ve been. I won’t leave you again. I promised you and Jiang Cheng that we would always be together.”

“Forever,” she finished for him, and gave a watery laugh. “Just as long as you promise never to disappear again!”

He pulled back, and looked her in the eye. “Never again,” he said solemnly, and then, an achingly tender smile on his face, wiped another tear from under her eye. She cupped his face his return, and gave a dazzling smile before tugging on a strand of his hair, dangling, as a few always were, messily around his face. Jiang Cheng gave a watery laugh.

Suddenly, a loud, enthusiastic voice called out, “Wei-xiong! Wei-xiong!” And Nie Huaisang skidded into the room. Everyone hastily wiped their eyes, but she didn’t seem to notice, running around Jiang Cheng to crash ungracefully next to Wei Wuxian.

“Wei-xiong, I Saw you come back! It’s so good to be proven —“ and she reached out to clasp his shoulder. Before her hand could land, Wei Wuxian’s whole body jerked back and with his other hand he caught her wrist in an almost bruising grip. They froze like that, Wei Wuxian’s shoulder half twisted back, Nie Huaisang’s hand trapped several inches away from it. The Jiang siblings looked on, equally startled.

Wei Wuxian was the first to react, and gave a breathy chuckle and a half smile. “Nie-xiong! It’s been too long.”

Nie Huaisang gave an equally awkward laugh, but it was barely a second before her smile turned more genuine. “Wei-xiong, you’ve been missing for months! Everyone’s been desperately looking for you. Especially Lan er-gongzi and Jiang Cheng. They almost —”

“That’s enough,” Jiang Cheng almost growled, grabbing her by her bicep and hauling her to her feet. “You’re talking too much.”

And over Nie Huaisang's stuttering protests, she was unceremoniously evicted from the room.

Jiang Yanli and Wei Wuxian watched on, both amused, before she turns back to Wei Wuxian, setting a slender hand gently on his arm. "A-Xian, I'll go prepare some food for you. Stay here and rest? We just got you back, and I don't want you to exhaust yourself."

He nodded, and smiled after her as she stood and exited. Then, the smile slowly slipping off his face, he picked up his flute and turned it around and around in his hands, expression still and unreadable.

Over the next few months, the Sunshot Campaign, the rebellion against the Sect of the sun, grew in size and strength. But the real turning point was the Jiang Sect, and their powerful new ally.

When people first began to hear rumours of a necromancer working with Sect Leader Jiang, the overwhelming majority felt nothing but disgust and horror.

The other cultivation sects, brought up as they were in the righteousness of their cause, felt it almost as a betrayal.

The Jin Sect in particular used it as a convenient excuse to lessen their involvement in the war. They began to send in fewer and fewer of their own cultivators.

Jin Zixuan, however, doggedly kept up his appearances.

Wei Wuxian was mildly disgruntled by this.

"It's the peacock again," he would mutter to Jiang Cheng whenever the opportunity arose, and Jiang Cheng would scowl and roll his eyes. But they were both, however faintly, impressed by his dedication.

As Jin Zixuan's reputation grew, Wei Wuxian's worsened. News of his necromancy spread, and his body count on the battlefield piled up, then rose again.

He often traveled, and fought, at the front of his allies. It was necessary - if he fought in close proximity to them, his own side would be as crippled as his enemies by the jarring sickness that surrounded his magic.

Dark rumours abounded, nonetheless.

"He just wants to sate his bloodlust. Who fucking knows how many people he's actually killing where we can't see," was a common sentiment, as was, "Everyone knows that Free Magic corrupts. As soon as he's done killing the Wen-dogs, he'll turn it on us, just you watch."

Wei Wuxian didn't seem to notice. The smile on his face never left. He ended the war, not single handedly, but with enough ease that none had any doubt that he could've. After all,

how could anyone be left alive when fighting against one who commanded Death? Wei Wuxian played his flute, Chenqing, and the living fell dead, and the Dead rose again, and he smiled.

Throughout the war, Wei Wuxian and Lan Wangji had gained a reputation for enmity. Pure, righteous, Hanguang-jun, filled to the brim with pure, unsullied Charter Magic, with his pristine white robes and frosty expression, seemed like the natural opposite to Wei Wuxian in every way. But their frequent arguments, in everyone's minds, over Wei Wuxian's methods, were what cemented the animosity between them.

Wei Wuxian himself did not seem immune to these rumours. He treated Lan Wangji with the same casual trust and teasing he had always done, but seemed to expect none of the same back.

"Come back to Gusu with me," Lan Wangji said again, after Wei Wuxian had called out for him from the top of the building in Yunmeng, spying him walking below on the streets.

Wei Wuxian, sprawled with his flute at the waist of his black robes, a bottle of spirits in one hand and some pretty spirits of the Dead surrounding him, looked up at him and gave a bitter smile.

Lan Wangji clutched the fresh flowers the Dead had thrown at him, at Wei Wuxian's request, against his chest. He stared down at that smile, so familiar, and yet not, and tried not to despair.

Later that day, Wei Wuxian asked his shijie what she saw in Jin Zixuan. "To love someone, even after they've hurt you. Isn't that like putting a rope around your neck, and handing them the other end?"

Chapter End Notes

Who needs their reputation or love? Wei Wuxian has a whole bunch of corpses, surely they can protect him?

On a different note, Nie Huaisang transes her gender (for fun and for plot reasons), but she's not really out at this point, so everything plays out as it did in the show.

a lover's embrace

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He was strolling through the markets of Yunmeng, and almost passed them without a second glance. Dirty, hunched over figures in rags had become all too common after the war.

They flinched and hid from Wei Wuxian's aura of Free Magic, and he, never particularly observant in the first place, barely noticed them.

This figure, however, suddenly straightened their back at his cheerful greeting of the stall owner next to them. They turned, looking him straight in the eye. He blinked at them, then almost reared back in surprise.

“Wen Qing?”

“Wei Wuxian,” she said, then stood, reaching out and clutching the front of his robes tightly in her fists. He flinched, but let her do it.

“Wei Wuxian,” she said again. “Please. I need your help. My brother, Wen Ning, he helped save you and your brother, and I don't know where he is, I don't know what happened, please. I need you to help me find him, before it's too late. Please,” she finished, voice cracking.

Never one to enjoy begging, Wei Wuxian found it almost viscerally uncomfortable to have Wen Qing beg him. Not only was she one of the proudest people he had ever come across, but she was also one he considered a friend.

There was no pride on her face now.

He laid his hands on her wrists, holding on loosely. “Wen Qing. Please do not beg. Tell me everything you know about where he could be, and I will find him.”

“You will?” she asked, voice trembling, eyes too big in her thin, dirt streaked face.

“Wen Ning is my friend too,” he said firmly, and steered her gently down onto one of the stall's stools. He held out a couple of fingers, and the owner served him two steamed buns, which he pushed over in front of her.

“Eat, and tell me.”

The rain had soaked them through by the time they made it to Qionqi Path, and the night was fully upon them. But the cold was nothing to a man who walked in Death, and though Wen Qing trembled, it was not from the cold.

At the top of the path, barely visible, were rows of shacks, built by and for the Wen prisoners of war. Wen Qing leaned on Wei Wuxian, and he supported her, as they made their way up.

Before they could reach them, they spied a figure, previously cloaked by rain, walking ever so slowly in the same direction. As they drew nearer, they could see she was an old woman, bent nearly in half with a toddler on her back. She carried the torn and defaced remnants of the Wen flag, and staggered under its weight.

Wen Qing let out a sob at the sight of her. “Popo! Popo, stop! It’s me!”

The old woman started and cringed at the loud voice, making a feeble attempt to move faster.

Wen Qing caught up to her easily, and took the flag off her, throwing it to the ground.

“Popo, it’s me,” she sobbed, and the old woman’s eyes widened. “Popo, please, tell me, where is a-Ning? Where is everyone else who was with him, the rest of our family? Where is a-Ning?”

The woman could not see well, but as Wen Qing’s distress visibly escalated, so did the dark aura around the tall, black clothed figure at her side. She shivered even more, and looked away, down into the valley that the path trailed along.

Wen Qing and Wei Wuxian continued up, and dark forms winked in and out of view, hunched and dirty, chains at their ankles, tools in their hands, their faces in shadow. The sound of hooves could be heard, thudding dully against the muddying path. The horses came into view, and high up upon them were dozens of inspectors, each carrying umbrellas and whips. They shouted and yelled, pacing easily behind the heaving, groaning mass of workers.

Wen Qing didn’t seem to care. She rushed into the fray, eyes scanning each despairing face frantically.

“Hey, where did you come from?” one of the supervisors shouted, as she darted among the prisoners. “Who let them in?”

She did not answer until they pulled in front of her, horse and rider looming menacingly.

“I’m here to find someone, please, I need to find someone!”

The man sneered, and pulled a long, iron brand from his belt. “Why the fuck would I care if you’re looking for someone? Only other Wen-dogs would try and find someone here, so if you stay here for much longer, we’ll start to —”

He cut himself off, for he recognised the man who had appeared beside her. A black shadow that melted out of the grey rain, face like a thundercloud, eyes the hardest thing about him. Nobody that had fought in the war forgot the smell of Free Magic that he carried with him, ozone and rust and blood. The scent was pouring off him now, and the inspector fought to keep his last meal down.

The rest of the inspectors either recognised him as well, or simply the aura of danger he carried around him. They stilled their horses beneath them. Nobody made a move to stop

Wen Qing as she resumed her search, running and searching and calling desperately for her brother.

But she knew that if he had been there, he would've run to her as soon as he heard her voice. She finally turned back to the inspectors and asked them if they had seen him, describing him in detail. They skilfully dodged each description, each question, claiming perfect ignorance, darting quick, uncertain glances at the tall shadow behind her, rain plastering strands of hair, like black tears, down his face.

"Look, lady," one of them bit out, finally. "If he's not here, then I don't know what to tell you. It's not our responsibility."

"All of the people under your guard, they are here?" asked Wei Wuxian, his body wavering and insubstantial through the rain, but his eyes hard, dark and steady.

The inspectors looked at each other nervously. "Yeah."

"I'm assuming you mean the living, yes? Where, then, are the dead?"

"Why do you think there are dead people? We're just here to guard, we don't kill people!" one of them piped up, foolish overconfidence in his voice.

Wei Wuxian looked at him. "Do you really think that I cannot feel them?"

His lip curling with disgust, he turned on his heel, and walked over towards the valley. He took Wen Qing's arm as he passed, and she leaned on him, face pale and bloodless.

Over the edge, at the bottom of the ravine, the bodies were piled.

Once she made it to the valley floor, Wen Qing did as she had done above. She went from corpse to corpse, steps slowed by mud and grief, gaze blurred by tears but still just as piercing. Wei Wuxian followed, silent as the dead. Until he stopped, suddenly, and picked up something off the ground. It was a broken protection talisman. Wei Wuxian recognised it only because he had made it; the Charter marks he had infused into it long dead and still. They had probably, Wei Wuxian thought numbly, been dead ever since his first foray into Death. He had never thought to check.

His gaze was torn from the talisman, clenched tightly enough in his fist that his knuckles were white around it, when Wen Qing cried out.

"Wen Ning, Wen Ning," she said as she sank to her knees. She had found him. She began running her hands over the crushed torso, over the stiff limbs, the unmoving chest, frantic Charter marks for healing flaring bright on her lips.

Wei Wuxian moved up behind her, placing a hand on her shoulder before kneeling next to her.

She cried harder, face twisting as her hands, graduating from their inspection, clutched him to her chest. Her face pressed into the cold curve of his neck, and she whispered his name again

into it. Then again, and again, louder and louder, until she was screaming it, muffled against dead flesh.

However much she wanted to, though, she couldn't scream forever. Her screams petered back into sobs, and she finally seemed to register the cold comfort of Wei Wuxian's hand on her shoulder.

She looked at him, but not at his red, weeping eyes, or the wet, black tangle of his hair. She looked down, at the tarnished silver flute at his waist.

"You brought your brother back," she said, slowly at first, like the words had to wade through the mud surrounding them to come out. "Didn't you?"

He looked at her, and his red eyes were incongruously gentle. "He had only just died. His spirit had not yet passed the First Gate, had not been diluted. It was easy enough to bring him back, and you were able to get his body breathing again."

He looked down, eyes dark and sorrowful. "It's possible Wen Ning has already passed through the Ninth Gate."

"Please," she whispered, voice hoarse and trembling, "he's my little brother." She looked him in the eye, and suddenly all he could see was his own little brother. His jaw set.

"I will look for him," he said. "I cannot promise I will find him, but I will look."

She clutched his hand in hers, grip almost bruising. Her eyes met his again, and Wei Wuxian was startled to find them almost feverishly bright.

"Do you need help, getting back into Death?" she asked, and he took a moment to understand her. When he did, he gave an involuntary laugh, dark and bitter.

"Death can never wait to get Her hands back on me."

Then he let go of Wen Qing's hand. He picked Wen Ning's rigid one up instead, and, one hand holding him, the other his talisman, he stepped into Death, as smooth and easy as stepping back into a lover's embrace.

Chapter End Notes

Again, see [here](#), for a reference for any Chinese terms used.

I skipped quite a cool scene here, where Wei Wuxian confronts Jin Zixun over his role in the murder and enslavement of the Wen people. I wanted to get right to my favorite scene, though, so I didn't do a rewrite. But this is still an incredible quote:

"Wei Wuxian! Do you wish to overthrow the Heavens?"

"Are you comparing yourself to the Heavens?"

And, of course, him sneaking into the banquet in general, and rescuing Lan Wangji from having to refuse to drink with Jin Zixun. Peak romance is actually doing a shot so your crush won't have to.

hands reach out, but they can't hold me

The current tugged, hard and playful, around his shins. He paid it no mind, but walked swiftly to the waterfall of the First Gate. The Free Magic burned against his lips like a well-spiced dish, and the waters opened around him.

He stepped through, and the waterfall's roar resumed behind him. The stronger current of the Second Precinct tore against his robes, pulling them into a spiral around him, but he strode confidently forward. He stepped neatly around each of the gigantic sinkholes that littered the bed of the river.

A soft splash came from behind him, and he almost missed it, eyes straining forward for any sign of the Second Gate. But his ears were sharp and attuned to the sound of the First Gate, and he whirled. Chenqing was already at his lips as he caught sight of the Dead thing. He almost began with a deep, low note, the sound of strength, the beginning of the melody that would shackle this Dead thing to his will. But the Dead thing was alone, and looked weak. He quickly reconsidered.

Instead, his fingers moved, and he played a low, sweet note. Then another, and another, soft, gentle sounds, like a lullaby, or a love song. The thing stilled, but not like it would have if he had bound it, harsh and tight like a man trapped in chains. But like child falling asleep in their mother's arms, heavy and quiet. Slowly, its arm lowered, then its head, and it drooped down into the current. And the river, ever greedy, did the rest.

Wei Wuxian tracked its motion, moving his feet almost unconsciously forward with the river. The Second Gate opened up in front of him, giant whirlpool cunningly silent. The pull increased abruptly around his legs and he tipped dangerously forward. Desperately he whirled his arms, forcing his legs up and out of the water, then back, back, back.

Panting, he stood still for a few second, looking down, deep into the whirlpool. Then he took a deep breath and spoke the words of the next spell. The frantic waters stilled, then froze into steps, and he walked down them gingerly, the icy spiral staircase dizzying his mind and eyes.

He stepped through the bottom of the pool, and broke into a run. The soft warmth of the air after the frozen hell of the previous precincts was a pleasant whip against his face, and the ankle length water barely tried to trip him.

He did not slow to enjoy the change. The wave was catching up.

It roared behind him, a beast's horrible wet pants against the back of his neck, but he did not look back. He just ran.

The mists of the Third Gate appeared into view, and he almost sobbed out the spell to part them. The wave loomed over his head as he stumbled through, legs burning, then crashed on either side of him.

The current of the Fourth Precinct was strong again, the light dim, but he walked through it coolly.

Throughout his journey, he had been keeping his senses keen, straining them ahead and all around for any sign of Wen Ning's spirit. But through the Fourth Precinct, he searched earnestly. It was not unlikely that a spirit, dead a few days, would be in the Fourth Precinct. And Wei Wuxian wanted him to be there desperately, because there were few places he hated more than the Fifth Precinct.

But he reached the deceptively shallow looking waterfall of the Fourth Gate without a single hint of Wen Ning's spirit. He stood well back from the waterfall. Jaw tight and flute at the ready, he called up the Dark Bridge.

The bridge coiled out slowly, like a black ribbon unfurling from a tight roll. It floated, narrow and slim, above the water.

The river here was too deep, the current too strong, to walk in. Any that tried, and that fell in, did not come out unaltered.

It also meant that when a necromancer opened up a pathway, the Greater Dead or beings of Free Magic immediately pounced on the opportunity to use it as well. Back towards the Fourth Precinct, and back towards Life.

He had barely gone through the gate when, sure enough, something appeared before him on the bridge. It barrelled towards him, a great, pale monster of a thing with too many legs, eyes and mouth boiling over with dirty flames.

If Wei Wuxian had not been in a hurry, he would have bound it. Played the notes for strength and shackling, then would've started playing something of jig. A jaunty, foot tapping, frolicking romp of a song. And the bound monster would have walked, unable to help itself, all the way through every single one of the gates, until it reached the ninth and final one.

But he was looking for his friend. He would have to settle this Greater Dead thing, intelligent and angry enough to hold a grudge, powerful enough to exist in the Fifth Precinct, with his lullaby.

Dreamy and soft, his flute rang out over the roar of the river below. The creature jerked, then slowed, but kept coming. Wei Wuxian walked forward as if to meet it, brows creased severely in the middle in concentration, soft, fluttering notes trailing around his head like dark moths.

The thing stopped. Its claws dragged and tore against the night dark bridge, but its great bulk was still, and Wei Wuxian, still playing, playing, playing, made to kick it off.

It looked up, the fires in its eyes, which had been dimming down like banked coals, suddenly flaring back to life. They blazed up, and its wicked, sickle sized claws swiped at his leg. His robes ripped, but his kick landed. The creature screamed and its fires blazed higher, but it fell down, once more, into the depths. The water was swift to reclaim it, and darkness was quick to replace its fire.

Wei Wuxian fell back against the bridge. His leg stretched out awkwardly in front of him. The blood was not obvious against his dark robes, but he could feel it, a strange warmth that cooled, quick and tacky, against his skin.

There was sure to be another creature soon, and so Wei Wuxian let the Free Magic bubble up in his mouth, frothing against his lips. He needed to be able to run, and the smell of fresh blood would only attract more trouble.

The magic fizzed and burned against the wound, and he clenched his jaw tight to stop his screams from escaping.

Then he hauled himself to his feet. His eyes blazed, and he ran, almost heedless of the narrow path. He needed to get to the other side before more came. He needed to find Wen Ning.

The Fifth Gate rose in front of him. The water flew upwards, a reverse waterfall, and Wei Wuxian swallowed down his vertigo. He spoke, and a thin tendril of water separated from the waterclimb. It reached out, across the gap between the bridge and the sheet of water, and wrapped gently around him in a watery embrace.

He rose up with the rest of the water, before he was suddenly jerked to a halt. The water that had held him snapped back in with the rest of the infinitely climbing water, and he was thrown out to the other side.

The overwhelming presence of the Dead rushed over his senses. There were hundreds of them in the Sixth Precinct, and the immensity of their numbers temporarily staggered him. But then, Wei Wuxian felt him.

“Wen Ning,” he whispered, his voice rough with overuse of Free Magic and emotion, and splashed out into the shallow pool of the Sixth Precinct, heedless of the Lesser Dead.

Greater Dead moved towards him, in amongst the other spirits, hungering for his spark of Life and power. He simply dodged, running towards Wen Ning’s presence.

“Wen Ning!” he shouted, and a spirit, pale and insubstantial, looked up and caught his eye. He was almost transparent, but he still managed to look solidly shocked at the sight of Wei Wuxian. Then, strangely enough, his eyes filled with grief.

“Wei-gongzi,” he said, voice soft as snow. “You are dead as well?”

“No,” he replied. “I still live. I came here for you,” and he grabbed his arm, pulling him from the water.

Wen Ning blinked in surprise. “For me? But it’s too late for me, I’m already dead.”

“Don’t you want to see your sister again?” Wei Wuxian asked, voice cracking slightly. “Please, I know you’ve gone a long way, and that this is almost unfair to ask, but. Don’t you want to live?”

Wen Ning looked at him, eyes wide and pale.

“Jie-jie found me? She looked for me?”

“She mourns you, even now,” he said, tensing as he felt one of the Greater Dead come up behind him.

Wen Ning’s eyes flicked to it, and then back to Wei Wuxian, the panic in them clear and bright. “You need to go!” he exclaimed, and moved to push Wei Wuxian out of the way.

Wei Wuxian just gripped his arm tighter in response. “I will not force you to return with me,” he said, and his face was terribly serious. “But you can, if you want it enough.”

Then he ducked out of the way as the monster plunged towards him, turning neatly and raising his flute to his lips.

This time, he did not play a lullaby. The strength of the first notes gave the creature pause, before it realised that Wei Wuxian’s will had not even been focused on it.

It laughed, a sound more awful than a scream, and lunged. But the Lesser Dead at its feet leapt up as it did so, so much less powerful than it, but overwhelming in number. More and more spirits rose, dragging it back and down, and the Greater Dead ripped them apart, roaring in anger.

Then Wei Wuxian switched to a different tune. A sprightly, springing song, a song to make one move. This song, unlike the previous one, *was* focused on the Greater Dead creature.

The thing began to twitch, to shiver, and it screamed, but the tune had its hooks in it and it could not fight it.

Still screaming, it turned, and twitched and jerked its away towards the Sixth Gate, constantly, without success, trying to turn back.

Wei Wuxian kept playing until the river’s current suddenly increased round his legs, indicating it had passed through to the next precinct.

The other Greater Dead in the Sixth Precinct kept well away from him after that.

He turned to look back at Wen Ning, who watched him with wide and serious eyes.

“Will you come?” he asked again, without much hope.

“I do not want to be like them,” Wen Ning said, looking over his shoulder to indicate the Greater Dead creature. “Like the Dead we fought in Life.”

“You won’t be. You’ll either come with me, or you can pass through the Ninth Gate, as peacefully as you want.”

He looked pensive. “Jie-jie will be waiting for me?”

“Yes.”

“You came all this way for her sake?”

“For hers, and for yours.”

Wen Ning looked at him. Many, especially as deep in Death as they were, would have seen the terrifyingly powerful necromancer that Wei Wuxian was, puppeteer of the dead, clothed in shadows. Wen Ning studied his drawn face and saw the man that had once smiled and laughed in the sunlight, and offered to help him with his archery. In the still, shallow waters of the Sixth Precinct of Death, he looked more fragile and breakable than the spirits that surrounded him, even with the Life that still glowed within him.

“I will go with you,” he said, and Wei Wuxian’s smile shone, burning through the grey fog. *And I will protect you,* Wen Ning thought fiercely, *and help you, back into Life and beyond.*

He took Wei Wuxian’s arm, and, together, they turned towards Life.

deal with the devil, he's the only one listening

Chapter Notes

Ref. for Chinese [terms](#).

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Wen Qing did not know how long she knelt in the pouring rain. At first, she had knelt with her neck bent, her chin resting almost on her chest, hands pressed against her mouth. A silent mourner. Through her long strands of hair, when her eyes were not clenched shut with grief, she could just make out Wei Wuxian's hand, ice thick and shimmering around it.

She wondered, when she could think of anything but her brother at all, whether he was someone else she would have to mourn.

Killer of her people, helper of her brother, and, not too long ago, a clever boy who had needled her and annoyed her and joked with her. Who treated her like a friend, like a person.

But as the minutes trickled by, she slowly straightened her spine, until her head was tilted back, face washed clean by the rain. She would not mourn prematurely. She would wait for them as long as she could.

Then she would find another way to free her people.

It was hours later that she heard the first crackle of ice. A sign of movement. Wen Qing strained forward.

The ice exploded. Wen Ning leaped upwards, eyes still white and glazed from Death, yet wild, somehow, and angry.

"Oh, fuck," said a hoarse thread of a voice from behind him. Wen Qing flinched, but it was only Wei Wuxian. But he was still and unmoving, ice thick around him, eyes wide with dread.

"What happened?"

Wen Ning broke into a run, running far too fast to be natural. Wei Wuxian's visible dread escalated rapidly into panic. He lurched to follow him, but he was obviously weak. Wen Qing stood with him, helping him up and out of the ice, the remnants falling like broken glass to disappear into the mud. She hauled his arm over her shoulder.

"What happened?" she demanded again, yelling it up at him as they stumbled after Wen Ning.

“I thought, I thought, I thought I brought him back, he was with me until, through the First Precinct, he was with me,” he rasped back, sounding completely wrecked, and Wen Qing’s heart ached.

They staggered over the lip of the valley, to the collection of prisoner huts. In the courtyard outside, the inspectors rushed to contain Wen Ning.

He killed them one by one, brutally and without mercy.

“Oh, shit,” Wei Wuxian said weakly. When he had first seen the bodies, piled high on the valley floor, when he had seen Wen Ning’s body, he had wanted to kill them too. Perhaps even like Wen Ning was doing now, unstoppable and cruel, fueled by revenge.

But looking at the carnage below him, his throat bloody and raw, hands trembling round Chenqing, he only felt sick. The Wen Ning he knew would never have done this. If he had only done things right...

He lifted his flute to his mouth, and played his lullaby again. Wen Ning’s gore painted fists loosened slowly, and he turned to look at Wei Wuxian, eyes still dull and blank.

The prison camp supervisors lay dead in pieces around him. Wei Wuxian lowered his flute warily, but Wen Ning did not shift.

Wen Qing just barely managed to catch Wei Wuxian as he collapsed, his legs giving out from under him. She slapped his cheeks lightly.

“Hey! Wei Wuxian! Stay with me!”

He blinked up at her with an effort. “I will round up my people,” she said, “get them mounted on the horses. You stay here, okay? Don’t faint again, and watch, watch a-Ning,” she ordered, her voice turning strong and sure, and he nodded.

They were all afraid of Wen Ning and of Wei Wuxian, infamous slaughterer of the Wens. But Wen Qing was their respected healer, a lady of acclaim and honour. And they were hungry, and weary, and wanted what any chained person did. To be free.

They mounted, three to a horse. Wei Wuxian, with effort, mounted one himself. He saw the old woman again, short and stooped amongst the others, struggling with the wiggling toddler on her back. Wei Wuxian reined his horse over to her.

He stretched out his hand. “You can give him to me.”

The old woman glanced up and flinched, naked fear in her eyes. But Wei Wuxian doubted that she would be able to carry him much longer, for the child was already wriggling free. He reached out, despite her protests, and caught him in his arms.

“A-Yuan, a-Yuan,” she cried, but Wei Wuxian simply sat the boy in front of him, and moved the horse over to Wen Qing. A-Yuan wriggled, but did not make an earnest attempt to escape. He nibbled on his fingers instead, casting wide-eyed glances back at him.

Wen Qing looked up at him, her gaze resolute. Wei Wuxian reached an arm down and she clasped it, pulling herself up behind them.

“Let’s go!” she shouted, and she nudged their horse into a trot, then a canter. The other dozen horses followed behind, and behind them, a corpse trailed after, easily keeping pace.

For Wei Wuxian, doorways into Death could be found almost everywhere. He had not been joking with Wen Qing when he told her that Death was always eager to take him back. Death, with all its complex traps and tricks and dangers, never let go of those it had held easily.

However, the door was always, to keep the metaphor going, open a little wider the less Charter magic there was, the less Life. And of course, the more death and dead there were.

The Burial Mound, outside of Yiling, was a veritable mountain of corpses. Once a city of great renown, it fell quickly into ruin once the six great Charter Stones at its centre were broken.

Six powerful Charter mages had to be sacrificed to do it. The doors of Death swung wide with their murders, and the necromancer that had done it waged war on the city citizens. They raised Dead after Dead, and they fell upon the living ravenously.

Cultivators came to the aid of the city, but the number of Dead were too overwhelming. So they did the only thing they could think of. They released the city’s water supply, contained above the city in a great dam, and it flooded down to cover both the living and the dead.

The cultivators dug great channels around the city, and the water from the dam settled down into it. And the Dead, being unable to cross the running water, and unable to stay in Life for long without feasting on the Living, slowly fell back into Death’s embrace.

But the city was, understandably enough, avoided from then on. For the broken Charter Stones kept the door of Death ajar, and the area around it was cursed and barren.

The closest town to the Burial Mound was Yiling, and even it seemed shrouded in a strange shadow. The locals cast wary glances at all strangers, and were home well before nightfall.

“This is a bad idea,” Wen Qing said wearily from behind Wei Wuxian, as they skirted the dark town, and moved towards the even darker shadow that loomed behind it.

“I would literally love nothing better than to hear of, literally, any other place where I would be able to defend your family from the Jin Sect, or all the other cultivators that want you dead,” he replied, equally tired. A-Yuan shifted restlessly in his sleep, huddled against Wei Wuxian’s chest.

“And against the Dead that roam the Burial Mound?”

He gave a bitter laugh. “The Dead need to defend themselves from me.”

At the edge of the channel, they made camp. Wei Wuxian set wards around them, the Free Magic coming disturbingly easy to his lips, despite the wide river between the broken stones and their camp.

He and Wen Qing gathered the horses.

“Excuse me,” came a voice from behind them. It was a woman, on the older side, but not entirely worn out from the journey like many of the others. “You’re going to sell the horses, but do either of you have bartering experience? No offence to Wen-guniang, or Wei-gongzi, but both of you come from... comfortable backgrounds.”

“No offence taken,” Wen Qing said briskly. “I take it you do have experience?”

“Yes, Wen-guniang,” she answered respectfully, bowing.

“Then you will come with us.”

Their return with food and farming supplies was heralded with great enthusiasm. The boat they carted with them, however, was eyed warily. All of them had avoided looking up to the crumbling city above them, but it could not be put off forever.

The last remnants of the Wen Sect knew, with no doubt in their minds, that the winners of the war would never be content to let them live outside of their control.

So over the channel they went. Wei Wuxian went first, the unresisting and unresponsive Wen Ning with him, and a younger, strong looking woman.

The sound of Chenqing drifted out over the water, and all of them shuddered to hear it. That sound, precursor, during the war, of Death, had haunted their nightmares for years. Yet all of them, however reluctantly, followed it across the water.

With someone rowing back each time to fetch more, they all crossed, three by three.

They huddled on the rotting dock like sheep surrounded by wolves, and it was only Wen Qing that was able to get them moving. They followed the sound of Death with slow steps. And watched, as whatever Dead that appeared, hungry for their Life, parted around them like commoners before an emperor, as they made their way up and up, to the crumbling city above.

Chapter End Notes

I love Wei Wuxian with all my heart, but everything he did in the war is certainly a lot to forgive on the Wen's behalf. It's never really touched upon in canon, but I think Wen Qing would have a lot of mixed feelings about him, especially considering her prior aid

of him, and (in the show) their friendship. They honestly have such a fascinating dynamic. Comes of them both being gay, of course.

mlm/wlw solidarity

Ah, and of course, in the show, we have that incredible scene in the rain with Lan Wangji! I thought I'd stay close to the book in regards to this chapter, but don't worry, we'll get to some neat Lan Wangji scenes eventually!

reap what you sow

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Three weeks later, Jiang Cheng, and his excessively large group of Jiang Yunmeng disciples, stood on the far side of the channel. Jiang Cheng's face was hard, mouth thin. Across from them, the Dead patrolled along the water.

He seemed, apart from being in a truly horrendous mood, to be mildly stymied.

"We, we could go back into Yiling and buy a boat?" offered one of his disciples timidly, and was promptly glared into a retreat.

He stood around, glare fierce on his face, for a few more moments, before finally heaving a rough sigh. "Fine. Fine! Go into town, all of you! Get a boat! Go!"

The disciples fled, and he turned his gaze, again, across the water, where he could just make out a small, rickety boat, tied to the rotting remnants of a dock. "While you do that, I will have *words* with my *brother*."

He reached into the eternal flow of the Charter, searching for the marks he needed before etching them firmly in his mind. Once they glowed, clear and bright behind his eyes, he released them. They sailed out, golden and fluttering, over the water to the boat. The ropes loosened, and it creaked, audible even from where Jiang Cheng stood. Then, slowly, under no power but that of the Charter, it glided over to him.

Jiang Cheng smiled grimly, and stepped in, sketching out more marks to take him across the shadow-filled water.

Wei Wuxian had once been the master of the Charter, and had, while they were growing up, outshone him in all their lessons without exception. It had, at once, puzzled, annoyed, and relieved him to notice that when he had reappeared after those three months, Wei Wuxian no longer used it to show off every other second.

But that didn't mean Jiang Cheng wasn't a master Charter Mage in his own right.

He breezed across the channel, and, as he drew closer and closer to the Dead, curled Zidian, his mother's whip, tight around his fist.

But as he stepped down firmly onto the dock, the Dead made no move towards him. Their white, glazed-over eyes followed him as he strode through their masses, but otherwise might have been nothing more than stinking statues for him to skirt around.

There was a path. Long overgrown but clearly recently used, and so he took it, striding up with all the grace of a storm cloud.

Nonetheless, he heard them before they heard him.

“Come on,” came a wheedling voice that he knew far too well, and had, historically, had far too high a success rate at getting him into trouble. “What about potatoes?”

“Radishes,” replied a woman’s voice, resolutely. “Radishes are easy to grow, they don’t die as often. Potatoes are hard to look after.”

“Radishes are gross, though,” Wei Wuxian said, and, as Jiang Cheng rounded the corner to catch a glimpse of them, pulled a face of exaggerated disgust.

Jiang Cheng snorted, and both him and Wen Qing glanced over. Neither of them looked surprised.

Beyond them, some women and older men were digging and turning over patches of the chalky earth. Wei Wuxian himself had been squatting down, picking fistfuls of soil up absentmindedly, and had been looking up to complain to Wen Qing. When he saw Jiang Cheng, he still had a handful. He stood, and the rocky dirt trickled gradually out of the gaps in his fist, like sand from a cracked hourglass.

He did not greet him, but walked straight past him, continuing up the overgrown mountain path. Jiang Cheng could only follow.

They passed more people working the earth, their clothes rough and ragged and plain, faces lined but not, surprising for such a dismal place, despairing.

Jiang Cheng watched them in confusion, the sick energy from the broken stones weighing down on him, heavy and oppressive.

Some of the workers caught sight of him in return, and they froze, like rabbits in the eye of an eagle.

Wei Wuxian waved his hand at them, vaguely. “He’s fine. You can continue, he’s not here for you.”

They returned to their tasks, still sending the stranger curious, wary glances.

“What are they doing?” Jiang Cheng asked, breaking the silence out of sheer frustration, replacing, at the last second, the word “you”.

“You can’t tell?” Wei Wuxian said, flashing a quick grin. “They’re farming.” The “obviously” went unsaid.

“They want to try and farm here?” he said, incredulous and disgusted. “In this decaying city of the Dead?”

“How else will we eat?” Wei Wuxian asked, question light and almost innocently curious.

Jiang Cheng waved that aside. “Will the things you dig from the ground here even be edible? Grown on a pile of corpses?”

“Oh, believe me,” Wei Wuxian said, voice deep, a strange chuckle in his words, and his mouth quirked in an odd half smile. “People will eat anything if they’re hungry enough.”

“Are you even going to be here long enough to reap what you sow? How long could a person live in a setting like this? It is a haunted and damned place.”

“As long as I am here, they will not need to fear the Dead,” Wei Wuxian said, looking away, eyes distant. “And there are worse places to have Life.”

“A life? You call this a life? What you have in Lotus Pier, that’s a fucking life!”

Wei Wuxian closed his eyes like he had suffered a blow.

“You’re not coming back,” Jiang Cheng said, with mounting horror. “Are you?”

Wei Wuxian grinned, eyes still closed. “Well, Yunmeng is so close to Yiling! I’ll be sure to come and visit.”

“Ha,” Jiang Cheng said bitterly.

He made to speak again, but tensed in alarm instead, as he felt a sudden pressure on his leg.

But it was only a toddler, little a-Yuan, huge brown eyes looking up at Jiang Cheng brightly.

Wei Wuxian thought it was adorable, but Jiang Cheng clearly disagreed. “Why is there a child here? Get it off me!”

His brother laughed. “By the Charter, I know you’ve met kids before, how are you this bad with them?” He bent down and scooped a-Yuan up, setting him on his hip. “A-Yuan, why do you hug the leg of everyone you meet? Some of them might be assholes like this guy! No, don’t bite your fingers after playing with the mud, you know what that stuff’s made of? Hand! Out of mouth! Please, don’t touch mine either.” Wei Wuxian sighed as a-Yuan did anyway, a cheeky grin on his chubby little face.

His grandmother shuffled up, eyeing Jiang Cheng warily, and Wei Wuxian lowered a-Yuan to the ground. “Off you go! Go play!”

A-Yuan took her hand reluctantly, and waddled off, tiny hand wrapped completely in his grandmother’s wrinkled one.

Jiang Cheng watched them go, mouth set in a bitter line. In an almost mocking tone he said, “The sect leaders are in uproar. They think you’ve gone and gathered the remnants of the Wen armies, and came here to crown yourself Lord of the Dead.” He snorted. “But they’re just old people. Women, the old, the weak, and a fucking baby.”

Wei Wuxian grinned, a little mocking himself. “He’s a toddler, actually, so you can see how that might scare them a little more.”

“Oh, fuck you,” he snapped back, almost automatically, then sobered. “Where’s Wen Ning?”

Wei Wuxian raised his eyebrows. “Since when do you care about Wen Ning?”

“Since the entire fucking cultivation world does!” Jiang Cheng hissed through gritted teeth. “Countless leaders have been asking me, demanding to know his whereabouts, like I would fucking know. So I came up here, to ask my own - to ask you.”

They had entered the city. Houses stretched out in front of them, walls without roofs pointing up, crooked and jagged, like the broken teeth of an ancient skull.

The road led to what had perhaps, once, been a grand temple. Carved partially from the mountain, it loomed above them, majestic still, despite the gaping mouth of the doorless entrance.

Wei Wuxian walked casually up the stone steps and entered it. Jiang Cheng, suppressing a violent shudder at the Free Magic bubbling from inside, nonetheless followed.

The stench of damp rock, Free Magic, and blood assaulted his nostrils immediately. Wei Wuxian, however, didn’t seem to notice. He strode forward, and Jiang Cheng made to follow, but immediately stepped on something. Pieces of paper were littered over the ground, scrawled all over with a messy hand. So were an almost dizzying assortment of other things. The thing he had stepped on had been a rectangular piece of thick cloth, like a flag, with a rune written on it in blood.

Wei Wuxian, somehow navigating with ease around it all, looked back and exclaimed, “Hey, don’t step on that! That’s useful, I’ve almost finished it!” and swooped back to pick it up.

Jiang Cheng took another step, and immediately stepped on something else. A round object, something like a compass. “Hey, don’t break that either! It’s not finished! That’ll be really useful as well.”

“Well, I’d have a much easier time not breaking your junk if you stopped leaving it all over the ground,” Jiang Cheng said peevishly.

“I live here alone, why does it matter?” he replied carelessly, and walked on. Symbols of blood were drawn everywhere, covering the walls and floors surrounding them.

“These meant to be Charter Marks?” Jiang Cheng asked gruffly. They looked familiar, but he couldn’t examine them closely without his eyes aching.

“Something like that.”

“If you had left your room in Lotus Pier in this state, I would’ve strangled you.”

Wei Wuxian grinned. “Ah, the joys of living alone.”

They entered another room. Wen Ning’s body lay, still and grey, in the middle of it. He was covered entirely in the same symbols that were littered everywhere outside, and the aura of Free Magic clung so heavily to him that Jiang Cheng barely stopped himself from retching.

Wei Wuxian, skirting around him nonchalantly, dumped the flag and compass in the corner.

“Lovely home you’ve got here,” Jiang Cheng said, keeping his eyes determinedly away from the body on the ground. “Where do you even sleep? In here with the corpse?”

Wei Wuxian didn’t acknowledge the sarcasm, just pointed to another pile of things, among which were a few ratty blankets. “With those, I can sleep anywhere.”

Jiang Cheng, for the sake of his sanity, did not pause to consider that statement. Almost against his will, his eyes were drawn back to Wen Ning.

“What happened to him?” he said, tone disdainful and slightly revolted.

“Oh,” Wei Wuxian said, tone very light. “I brought him back a bit wrong, somehow. So, I suppose I’m trying to fix that. I think I’ve almost worked out the bridge on the song for memory —”

“And do what? What are you trying to make him into?”

“Who he was when he was alive. The Wen Ning I knew.”

Jiang Cheng scoffed. “All I can see now, and all he ever will be, is a corpse. If you keep trying, all you’ll bring him back as is one of the Greater Dead.”

“I don’t think so. I found him in there, you know? In Death, his spirit. It’s here, now, in Life, in his body, I just need to figure out how —”

“What were you doing in Death? You went in there, just to find *him*?”

“I had no choice,” Wei Wuxian said with a slight smile. “His sister asked it of me.”

He shrugged.

Jiang Cheng made a sound that was almost a growl. “His sister? No choice? If you had no choice, then neither do I!”

He unsheathed his sword.

Chapter End Notes

Oh, Jiang Cheng, he went in there for you first.

exception to a lot of things, exceptional wei wuxian

Chapter Notes

Ref. for Chinese [terms](#).

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

“What are you doing?” Wei Wuxian cried, catching his wrist before he could clear Sandu.

“I’m going to finish this! His body should’ve been burned to ash when you found him, as is tradition! Instead you’ve brought back this, this, thing, this weapon, and used it against the sects! They have hounded me for days, interrogating me for an explanation, and I had no option but to come here and get one myself!”

“An explanation? What is there to explain? Those *members of the sects*, they beat Wen Ning to fucking death! And then he came back, and he killed them. Eye for an eye, life for a life, what more could there be to explain? It’s over.”

“Over? You think it’s over, just because you said so? Do you have any idea how many eyes are watching you, sitting pretty atop your army of the Dead, refusing to return to face justice?”

“As if they could contain me,” Wei Wuxian said, proud and bitter, and turned away. “Is it not enough, to jail myself here? What else could they want?”

“What else? You could end this!”

“End what? How?”

Jiang Cheng pointed his sword at Wen Ning. “Burn his corpse to ash, then return to them all those leftovers of the Wen Sect. Then, you will be forgiven.”

“You want me to return Wen Qing? Little a-Yuan? If we handed them over, they would be slaughtered, you know that!”

“Why do you fucking care?” Jiang Cheng yelled, his voice echoing across the stone. “Who even are these people to you? They’re just Wens, kin to those that massacred our sect, killed my parents!”

“And Wen Ning, who saved your life, retrieved the bodies of Jiang-shushu and Yu-furen?” Wei Wuxian asked, voice trembling. “Wen Qing, who healed you, saved your life?”

“They may have helped us before, but they’re still Wens! They lost the war! They’ll always be a target, always be condemned, for as long as they live. No matter what they’ve done, their

surname proclaims them guilty. Everybody, not just of the sects, but *everybody*, loathe the Wens, and long for their deaths. Those that seek to protect them go against the entire world. No one would speak for them, and no one will speak for you!”

“I do not need anyone to speak for me.”

“Why are you so stubborn! If you cannot do it then *move aside*. I will finish this.”

Wei Wuxian did not move, except to clamp his hand down, tighter than a vice, around his arm. “Jiang Wanyin!”

“Wei Wuxian! Don’t you get it? Don’t you understand? When you stood on their side, you were the hero, the force of the rebellion, the eccentric, un-imitable genius, the flower that blooms alone. But the second your voice differed from theirs, you’ve lost your mind, you’ve ignored morality, you’ve walked the crooked path. You think you’re immune to all their fear, their hatred, their judgement, here on your little island of Death? They will find you, even in Death, and you will be condemned. There has never been any exception.”

“Then I will be that exception!”

They stared at each other, tense and panting. After a few moments, Jiang Cheng spoke again, voice almost pleading. “Do you still not know what this is about? Do you truly need me to say it? If you continue to protect them, I will not be able to protect you.”

“You don’t need to. I don’t need it. Just let me go.”

Jiang Cheng felt his heart and face twist.

“Let me go. Tell the world I defected. Only then will nothing I do reflect on you, on the Yunmeng Jiang Sect.”

“You would do... all this. All this, for the Wen Sect?” he said finally, voice defeated. *But you would not come back for me?* hovered, unspoken, in the air. But Wei Wuxian did not seem to notice, turning so his eyes, bright and unhappy, could not be seen.

“My mother always said you’d bring our sect nothing but trouble,” Jiang Cheng said, finally, upon receiving no answer. “Guess she was right.” He gave a bitter chuckle. “You will be the exception? Attempt the impossible? Fine. Sure. You understand the Yunmeng Jiang Sect’s motto better than I do. Better than anyone else does, better than anyone ever has.”

Wei Wuxian was silent. Jiang Cheng sheathed Sandu with a *shing*. He tone was almost businesslike when he said, “Fine. Have it your way. Let us arrange for a duel.”

The duel was done outside of the Burial Mounds, in Yiling, as public as they could get it. They made it quite the show, but it was not just that. Jiang Cheng left, left arm broken, and Wei Wuxian with a deep souvenir from Sandu on his stomach.

The spectators spread the word far and wide of their falling out. Jiang Cheng told the sects of Wei Wuxian's defection. From then on, no ties would remain between the Yunmeng Jiang Sect and Wei Wuxian. No matter what he did, it would not be on their head.

Wei Wuxian, after their fight, brought some potatoes on the way home, blood still glistening wet against his black robes. It had dried by the time he made it back to the Burial Mound, another unnoticeable discolouration.

Wen Qing, when he arrived, yelled at him. "I told you to get radish seeds, not potatoes!" Then, grumpily, she asked, "Were you injured?"

"Nope," he said cheerfully, and walked off, whistling. She looked after him, mouth pursed and brows wrinkled in the middle. She was a healer, yes, a healer of the Charter, but one didn't need to be a Charter Mage of her caliber to catch the heavy aura of Free Magic surrounding him.

So she marched up after him, grabbed his wrist in a bruising hold, and dragged him into her work space.

Wei Wuxian protested the entire way, strenuously, but didn't try to pull away. He had no doubt that if anyone could find a way to make his trip into Death a permanent one, it would be Wen Qing.

Inside the small, bright shack hung bunches of the fragrant, dried herbs that Wen Qing had managed to find around the mountain. On the table, a basket of mushrooms gave off a sweet, earthy smell. Wen Qing shoved Wei Wuxian down onto the table next to them.

"Tell me where you were hurt, or I'll make you eat nothing but unseasoned radishes for the next month," she threatened, though, Wei Wuxian thought, the three needles clenched between her fingers (in her hands quite a masterful weapon) were much more intimidating.

"It's nothing! It's nothing, I'm fine, you know me! Can bounce back from anything, I'm like a slingshot!"

She gave him the most unimpressed look that he had ever seen. "You may have *bounced back* from Death twice, the first time, I might add, three months too late, but I'm not going to let you suffer in silence when you don't need to. Where. Were. You. Injured?"

He cringed. "Please don't stab me with your little needles."

"If you don't —!"

"Yeah, yeah," he sighed, then started undoing the top of his robe. He paused before undoing his inner robe, giving Wen Qing an attempt at a roguish wink. She rolled her eyes dramatically skyward. Wei Wuxian gave a quick flash of a real grin before putting on an exaggerated, lecherous one.

"Like what you see, eh, Wen —?"

“You honestly seem to think that I won’t stab you,” she interrupted, speaking almost conversationally. “But that would be your mistake.”

“Speaking of stabbing,” Wei Wuxian said brightly.

Wen Qing frowned at his stomach. “There’s no wound here, or even a scar,” she said. “Just dried blood.”

“Yup! Told you I was fine, but you *made* me strip down anyway, really Wen Qing, very inappropriate for a young lady to —”

“Charter Magic wouldn’t do that,” she said, bluntly.

“Huh?”

“Charter Magic would leave a scar, would leave something as a sign of life continued. Only Free Magic would leave no scar, and that’s with the heavy application of it.”

“And so?” Wei Wuxian said, a slight smile on his face. “You already knew I did Free Magic. You’ve even done it with me.”

“Small amounts, small amounts!” she stressed. “Free Magic must be used in small amounts, because otherwise the toll on the user becomes far too high! It can leave no scar, it can bring the dead to Life, but at an enormous cost!”

“I can pay,” he said.

She sighed. “You are paying.”

“What,” he began, giving her a tight smile, “you think I’m becoming evil too, just like all the sects do? The wicked necromancer, righteous when he’s useful, monstrous when he’s a rebel?”

“You are not evil,” she said. “But your body is under a lot of strain, which means your mind is, which means your spirit is.”

Without waiting for a reply, she continued, sounding contemplative. “Using Charter Magic more would help, and I don’t know why you aren’t, actually. You used to love shoving your skill with Charter Magic in everybody’s face.”

She looked at him again, and was startled to find him looking back, no smile on his face. Without his habitual smirk, exhaustion and hunger seemed etched onto his face, in the valleys underneath his cheekbones, in the bruise-like bags under his eyes. Shadow and bone.

Resources had been stretched thin, and none of the refugees had been eating well, but Wen Qing had the sudden, uneasy feeling he had been eating less than any of them.

“Touch my Charter Mark,” he whispered, voice rough.

Wen Qing, foreboding ringing through her body like the toll of a bell, nonetheless reached out and touched two fingers to his forehead, swift and impersonal like the healer she was.

The sour tang of corruption jarred through her fingers, through her own head, as she had known it would. Her hand flinched away as if from a fire, and Wei Wuxian gave a quick, joyless laugh.

“The Charter has rejected me,” he said, leaning towards her and putting on a parody of a confiding smile. “I try to create the marks in my mind and they dissolve like a sword in acid. Nothing but chaos comes from these lips anymore, no matter what I try,” and he laughed, like it was tearing his throat to do it.

“And I can see you thinking, Wen Qing, Master Healer, thinking of ways to fix me,” he continued, correctly interpreting her silence, manic smile still on his face, “and I appreciate it, I do, I really do, but I’ve never heard of anyone purifying their Charter mark before this, and I’ve looked, I’ve looked, I’ve looked in every book about the Charter, about anything, that I could get my hands on after I came back, okay, everything about Free Magic, about necromancy, I’ve looked and I’ve looked, and there’s *nothing*. There’s nothing,” he repeated softer, smile gone, fatigue settling comfortably upon his face. “Once corrupted, always corrupted. I know you know that.”

Elbows against his knees, he buried his face in his hands.

Wen Qing pressed her lips together until they were bloodless. “You could get re-baptised?”

He let out a sound that could have been a breathy laugh, or the sound of someone trying desperately not to cry.

“Tried it. Another rejection, how fun!”

She sighed, and let her hand rest gently against the bony curve of his shoulder. “I will look into it. In the meantime...”

“In the meantime? Stop finding ways to bring your brother back? Stop keeping the Dead from turning on us, and the wolves from our door? Stop keeping myself from bleeding out, from a wound my own brother gave me?”

He lifted his head, and looked her in the eyes. “If I could never feel the fire of Free Magic on my tongue again, I would be a happy man.” He laughed. “But it seems happiness has never really been my lot in life. Just a temporary stopover.”

He pulled his robes straight, bowed to Wen Qing, and left.

Kind of tragic that the last scene wasn't part of the show, because I only just realised that Wei Wuxian was shirtless for at least half of it. Though actually, anyone else get kind of anxious about how thin all the actors were? Shadow and bone, indeed.

i forgot how you make me laugh

Chapter Notes

Ref. for Chinese [terms](#).

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Days of peace followed, unexpected and almost strange. Perhaps Wei Wuxian felt like a burden had been lifted, confiding in Wen Qing, or perhaps he didn't. Either way, he seemed content to help the Wen family in all their tasks, to assist as they worked to repair the abandoned buildings of the city to make them more fit for habitation, helped to plant and cultivate vegetables, green plants amongst green moss. He attempted to help with cooking them, only to be permanently banned from the kitchen. For hours, sometimes days, he holed up in the decayed temple, working to bring Wen Ning's spirit back. And whenever he was free, he would look after Wen Yuan.

He seemed happiest when looking after Wen Yuan. But despite his easy, bright smiles, Wen Qing watched as they appeared on a thinner and thinner face, as he skipped sleep and skipped meals in favour of anything and everything else.

At one communal mealtime, she watched, pleased, as he came in with the squirming toddler in his arms and got himself a big bowl of the vegetable soup they had made, and then, in frustration, as he proceeded to help Wen Yuan devour the lot.

She went over and smacked him over the head. "Are you eating any of that yourself?" she asked, severe.

He grinned up at her. "What, steal from a-Yuan's plate?" A-Yuan looked up at his name, and Wei Wuxian grinned down at him. "Steal from this chubby little monster?" And he started tickling his belly, until he had him on the ground, rolling about and shrieking with laughter.

Wen Qing rolled her eyes and walked away, but Wei Wuxian began to find a lot more bowls of food around the temple, each with an almost illegible note saying, "DO. NOT. WASTE. I WILL KNOW IF YOU DO NOT EAT IT!"

Wei Wuxian kept all the notes for the express purpose of making fun of Wen Qing for her doctor's handwriting, but still finished each bowl.

Wei Wuxian's help was appreciated, but his most important duty in the Burial Mound was to keep control of the Dead. But they needed supplies, and any non-cultivator who went across the water risked their life.

So Wei Wuxian, to his restless heart's delight, was often the supply runner.

He was in the midst of burying Wen Yuan up to his tummy in earth when one of the younger women, who often assisted Wen Qing when she needed it, came up to him. She had watched them for a few moments before, wearing a judgemental expression eerily similar to Wen Qing's.

"What are you doing to him?" she asked, finally.

Wen Yuan spoke up cheerfully in Wei Wuxian's defence. "I'm a radish, so Xian-gege told me that I'd grow taller if I was planted and watered."

She blinked. Evidently she was not a woman that had often been around children, or guardians like Wei Wuxian.

"Wen-guniang asked me to tell you to go into Yiling again, we need more food supplies."

Wei Wuxian grinned down at Wen Yuan. "You hear that, a-Yuan? We're going to the markets!"

A-Yuan cheered. The woman looked on doubtfully, clearly wondering whether Wei Wuxian could be trusted to bring him back safely. Wei Wuxian ignored her, and after giving a-Yuan's mud-encrusted robes a quick brush off, scooped him up.

"Oh, wait, Wen-guniang said to give this to you?" she added hastily, when it seemed like he would be off right at that moment.

She held out a strip of paper.

"Oh, yeah," he said, turning around, grabbing it, and shoving it into an inner pocket.

"Thanks," he tossed over his shoulder, as he and Wen Yuan disappeared down the path.

Now, Wei Wuxian generally wasn't a terrible babysitter. He considered himself to be really quite brilliant at it. But he would be the first to admit that he'd maybe been a bit too into haggling over those potatoes before he realised Wen Yuan was missing.

"Oh shit, fuck, popo's gonna murder me, oh fuck, fuck, fuck, Wen Qing will bring me back and murder me again, fuck, fuck," he chanted as he abandoned the fiercely haggled potatoes and scoured the streets.

Then he heard, coming from the opposite end of the street, some loud toddler wailing. He raced off in search of the source.

He was busy looking just above ground level, so the boots were what he saw first. *White boots?* he thought. *Who wears white boots in — wait a second! I know who would wear —*

Then he noticed a-Yuan. He was sprawled on the ground just in front of the white boots, and he was bawling his eyes out.

He had attracted a few murmuring spectators with his noise, but Wei Wuxian ignored them, pushing straight through, and scooping him up. “A-Yuan, I’m here, I’m here, but why are you? Why did you wander off? You almost gave me a heart attack!”

A-Yuan didn’t seem up to replying, but his crying slowed, and he wiped his streaming nose liberally on Wei Wuxian’s shoulder.

Wei Wuxian looked up. Lan Wangji looked back, white robes and boots immaculate as always, face just as clean of emotion as his robes.

“Eh? Lan Zhan? What are you doing here?”

Lan Wangji’s gaze slid slowly to Wen Yuan, then back to look him in the eye, his gaze strangely burning. “In Yiling,” Wei Wuxian clarified, without really knowing why.

“A night-hunt,” he replied, voice as even as ever. “I was just passing through.”

Wei Wuxian felt himself relax. Lan Wangji did not lie - if he said he was here for a night-hunt, then there was no possibility that he was here to apprehend Wei Wuxian.

Lan Wangji gave Wen Yuan’s back, where Wei Wuxian was rubbing a hand soothingly up and down, a sharp look, and asked, a little reluctantly, “The child?”

“Oh, he’s mine,” Wei Wuxian said cheerfully, just to see if the lie would be shameless enough to get an eyebrow twitch.

Lan Wangji’s eyebrow twitched.

Wei Wuxian cackled. “Nah, I’m kidding, I’m kidding! He’s someone else’s, I’m just babysitting. Not very well, though, clearly!” he said with another laugh. “What I want to know, though, is how you managed to make him cry within two seconds of meeting him, that’s honestly a little impressive.”

“I did not do anything to make him cry,” Lan Wangji, not sounding defensive purely because he never sounded of anything.

Wei Wuxian grinned. “It was probably that stern face that you copy from your uncle, that’d terrify anyone without prior warning.”

Lan Wangji did not point out that it had not terrified Wei Wuxian. “Oh, hey, a-Yuan, look, aren’t those some pretty butterfly toys?”

Wen Yuan sniffled, and wiped some more snot on Wei Wuxian’s robes. “Yeah...”

“Great, now you’re distracted, let’s stop crying and go!” and he ran off before Wen Yuan could insist on a closer look.

He stopped and looked back, out of breath from the toddler's weight, and put him on the ground, though he kept a tight hold on his hand. He looked around, expecting Lan Wangji to be right behind him. He was a little surprised, and disappointed, to find that he wasn't - that he hadn't followed them.

But, after waiting a few moments, Lan Wangji came back into view. He wove through the other market goers with his usual sedate, graceful pace. In his hands were a number of toy butterflies. They stood out against his white robes, bright and lively and colourful.

He reached them, and handed the butterflies, wordlessly, to Wen Yuan. The boy took them, equally speechless, eyes wide and glittering.

"For me?" he said eventually, shyly, and Lan Wangji nodded gravely. A-Yuan looked up at Wei Wuxian, who laughed.

"Lan Zhan, who knew you were the kind of man who'd spoil a —"

He cut off when Wen Yuan let go of his hand abruptly, then walked over and latched onto Lan Wangji's leg with both arms. It was a determined hold, and Lan Wangji stood frozen under it.

Wen Yuan shot Wei Wuxian a smug look, as if to say, *This would be happening to you if you had bought me butterflies.*

Wei Wuxian almost broke a rib from how hard he burst into laughter. "You, you'll, you'll never get rid of him now," he stuttered out through the fits. "Once he hugs your leg you're stuck with him for life, you're his favourite!"

Lan Wangji expression did not change, but Wei Wuxian, looking at his eyes, suspected he was going through a minor identity crisis. Another helpless peal of laughter broke over him, and he doubled over.

"Welcome to fatherhood, eh, Lan Zhan?" he said, another attempt at riling him, and was delighted when he received not only an eyebrow twitch, but also some distinctly red ears.

"Well, you're not gonna be going anywhere with that limpet on your leg," he said, wiping a tear of laughter from his eye. "Might as well let me take you to lunch."

Lan Wangji looked at him, face still and ears red. "Lunch?"

Chapter End Notes

A lighter chapter ✨

Lan Wangji, babe, I missed you too, I'm sorry for his absence, I blame canon! And Wen Yuan, baby ♥♥♥

More of both next chapter!

butterflies

“Yeah, I’m starving, you? Come on, it’s been ages since I last saw you, you haven’t visited me *once* since I came to Yiling, really very rude you know. Come on, it’ll be my treat.”

Wei Wuxian grabbed his arm and hauled him down the street. Between Wei Wuxian dragging him and Wen Yuan clinging to his leg, it was impressive that he made it to the restaurant at all.

Lan Wangji was pushed him down onto the sitting mat, and Wei Wuxian ordered him at the same time to order.

“You can order,” Lan Wangji said, somewhat indifferently.

“I’m the one treating you!” Wei Wuxian said. “You have to be the one to order. Don’t be so polite!”

Lan Wangji ordered. “Ooh, not bad Lan Zhan, gonna have to revise my level of respect for you. I thought they didn’t make spicy things in Gusu? I thought for sure you had a baby palate. It’s fun to be proven wrong though, eh? Want a drink as well?”

Lan Wangji shook his head. “Still sticking to your sect’s rules, huh, even when you’re not there? Not particularly surprising for the great Hanguang-jun.”

The great Hanguang-jun, was, at that moment, having great difficulty drinking his tea around an active armful of toddler. Said toddler was having an enormous amount of fun with his new toys.

He had not had toys like these in a very long time. Perhaps ever.

Wei Wuxian watched in amusement for a while before attempting to help. “A-Yuan, come sit over here with me, you’re in poor Lan Zhan’s way there.”

Wen Yuan ignored him, continuing to play with the toys Wei Wuxian had decidedly *not* brought him.

“A-Yuan, stop ignoring me, it’s hurting my feelings,” Wei Wuxian whined, but Lan Wangji finally spoke up to say, “It’s fine, he can sit with me,” and adjusted him to sit more comfortably.

Wei Wuxian laughed as he spun the chopsticks in his hand. “Again, I really wasn’t expecting you to be the pushover parent, Lan Zhan, but it’s delightful news to me.”

The wine and dishes soon arrived. The bowls made the table into a sea of red, and Wei Wuxian let out an impressed whistle.

There was one bowl not liberally engulfed in spice. Wei Wuxian attempted to use it to attract Wen Yuan to his side of the table. Wen Yuan was, however, far too occupied in making two of his butterflies fall in love to consider moving.

With a grumble, Wei Wuxian pushed it over to Lan Wangji. Said man then managed, with very little effort, and no words, to convince Wen Yuan to put his toys away and eat.

Once he had the first mouthful, Wen Yuan ate very swiftly.

He had not had food like this for a very long time. Perhaps ever.

However, before he finished the bowl, he paused, then offered the rest to Wei Wuxian. “For Xian-gege. It’s yummy! Jiejie is always saying you need to eat more.”

Wei Wuxian laughed, bright and happy. “So you do have some loyalty left! Don’t worry, a-Yuan, I’m eating plenty, you finish it!”

“Speech is forbidden while dining,” Lan Wangji said serenely. Then, looking at Wen Yuan, he reworded, saying, “Do not talk when you are eating.”

Wen Yuan nodded, and eagerly continued polishing off his soup. “Oh, hey, that’s not fair! He never listens to me, how did you say that just once and get him to respect it?”

“Speech is forbidden while dining,” Lan Wangji said again. “For Wei Ying, as well.”

Wei Wuxian grinned. He emptied a cup of wine, and, as he spoke, rolled it around the table absently. “You really haven’t changed, huh, Lan Zhan? No matter how many years pass.” The cup stilled. “Look at me! Out to lunch with someone that I knew before, and they haven’t even tried to avoid me, or — ” He cut himself off and laughed again.

“It’s been impossible to get any gossip! It’s so boring, without any news of the cultivation world, come on, I know you don’t gossip, but tell me if anything big happened?”

Lan Wangji paused for a few moments before speaking. “What would count as something big?”

“Oh, you know,” Wei Wuxian said airily. “If a new sect appeared, if any sects formed alliances with each other. I know I won’t get everything from you, but. Anything.”

“A marriage,” Lan Wangji said after an even longer pause.

“Which sects?”

“The Lanling Jin Sect and the Yunmeng Jiang Sect.”

Lan Wangji looked away from the awful, frozen expression on Wei Wuxian’s face. “My shij- Jiang-guniang and, and Jin Zixuan?”

Lan Wangji nodded, gaze focused on Wen Yuan.

“When will it be?” Wei Wuxian felt his volume creeping up, and make a disconcertingly large effort to check it. “The ceremony, that is?”

“In a week’s time.”

Wei Wuxian lifted his cup to his lips, and, when he realised it was empty, shook his head, slamming the cup down with slightly more force than necessary.

He was silent for an uncharacteristic amount of time. Then he scoffed, lightly, and, with an effort, brought a slight smile to his face. “Jin Zixuan was let off the hook too easily,” and he poured himself a new cup of liquor, downing it neatly with one flick of his wrist.

“Lan Zhan, what do you think of this marriage?”

Lan Wangji just watched him, eyes gentle in his jade face. “Oh, sorry, right, I know you’re not interested in those sorts of things.”

He heaved a sigh, and, forgetting his smile, let his mouth fall into a soft sadness. It settled easily, comfortably, into the lines of his face.

“I know that behind our backs, lots of people talk about how my shijie doesn’t deserve Jin Zixuan, that he’s too good, too perfect for her.” He scoffed. “But my shijie is a million times too good for him! If only she hadn’t —”

Fallen in love with him.

“She deserves so much better than him,” he continued, banging his cup on the table again. “The best person in the world! We said, we would talk about, all of us, Jiang Cheng and shijie and I, we said she would marry the best person in the world, have a grand banquet that everyone would admire and praise, for years, a hundred years to come! We would watch my shijie get married with absolute splendour.”

His mouth twisted, and he looked at Lan Wangji like he was begging him for an explanation. “Now I won’t even get to see it.”

Lan Wangji stared back, helpless as Wei Wuxian to change anything, or to comfort.

Wen Yuan, playing next to Lan Wangji, let out a distressed sound as the strings of his butterflies got knotted together, and Lan Wangji helped him untangle them.

When he looked up again, Wei Wuxian, in one of his quicksilver changes of mood, or at least, the appearance of it, was smiling softly at them.

“You know, Lan Zhan, if you treat him much better, you’re gonna have a kid for life, because I doubt he’s gonna want to come back with me after —”

He jumped, and with a curse, pulled out a flaming piece of paper, covered in Charter marks, from inside of his robes. It burnt to ash in his hands before he could conceivably read them, but it didn’t seem to matter. He leapt to his feet at once.

“Fuck,” he said again, and, with one motion, scooped Wen Yuan up and was out the door.

Wen Yuan whimpered as he dropped his butterflies, but was otherwise silent as they left the restaurant at a dead run.

Lan Wangji, however, caught up to him easily, and casually slipped the butterflies back into Wen Yuan’s hands.

“Lan Zhan?” Wei Wuxian panted. “Why are you following?”

“It was a warning signal?”

“Yeah.”

“I will come.”

Wei Wuxian spared him a single, intense glance, but did not thank him.

When they got within sight of the Burial Mound, Wei Wuxian gasped out another curse. The Dead that were meant to be guarding the perimeter of the water were no longer there. Wei Wuxian attempted both to speed up and draw Chenqing at the same time, and in the process almost tripped over his own feet. Lan Wangji wordlessly took Wen Yuan, and continued his own smooth, effortless run.

They reached the boat, and with a subtle flare of Charter magic, Lan Wangji sent it sailing across the water.

Wei Wuxian’s legs jiggled impatiently up and down, as did his chest with great, uneven breaths. His flute hovered over his lips, but it wasn’t until they were close enough to hear the distant roars of the Dead that he began to play.

Despite his breathlessness, the first note was clear and true. It rang out over the water and up the mountain. The roars stopped.

He did not run up the mountain. He did not need to. He walked, one slow step at a time, eyebrows furrowed and eyes closed, and he played, note after note, the melody complex and interwoven and strong, a net made of steel.

But it did not catch everything. Another roar came, strangely anguished, and Wei Wuxian’s eyes popped open, though his brow remained furrowed. But he did not start running until he heard Wen Qing.

“A-Ning! A-Ning, please!” she cried, and, still playing, he began to run. Lan Wangji followed behind, Wen Yuan still firmly clutched in his arms.

They rounded a corner. The villagers were scattered around, hiding behind trees and buildings, but they were all peeking out to watch the spectacle unfolding.

The Dead Hands that Wei Wuxian had had patrolling the perimeter had clearly broken free of his control. The reason for this was immediately obvious, but they were also of little concern.

Wei Wuxian's playing had already bound them anew.

The Free Magic construct, the one that had been powerful enough to break through Wei Wuxian's wards, powerful enough to control the Hands, powerful enough to make it back to Life in the first place, looked at Wei Wuxian. Lava dripped from its mouth, boiling and molten, and it charged.

But a slim, grey figure, one that Wei Wuxian had barely noticed until then, dwarfed as it was by the beast, somehow managed to pull it back. With its bare hands, it restrained it, then, with a mighty heave, it picked the monster up and threw it down the street. It levelled a nearby house, and lay there for a moment, apparently stunned.

The figure turned, and looked at the newcomers. Wei Wuxian felt his heart leap into a gallop. There was no way he could fail to recognise the person he had spent months trying to bring back to Life.

But Wen Ning, despite his sudden return to activity, did not seem to recognise him in return. He turned away, and roared at the Free Magic construct. It clambered upright, and roared back.

They flew towards each other, and resumed their fight.

"Lan Zhan, you —" Wei Wuxian began, then frowned when he realised Lan Wangji wasn't behind him.

He looked around a little wildly, before spotting him on top of a roof, near the fight. He had his sword in one hand, and was watching the Dead battle below with a look of intense concentration.

Might as well make it easier for him, Wei Wuxian thought, and put his flute again to his lips, letting his eyes flutter closed.

He played the lullaby.

does the walker choose the path, or the path choose the walker?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

He wasn't exactly sure how the rest of the fight went. It was over quickly, with Lan Wangji's typical perfect efficiency. He only knew that the creature was crippled by his sword before he pulled out his zither, and sent it back into Death with one binding strum.

When he opened his eyes, Wen Qing was between the motionless figures of Lan Wangji and Wen Ning. She had run out as soon as the fight ended, and stood with her back to her brother, facing Lan Wangji.

She told him, "You will not hurt him," and her voice trembled.

He only watched her, his expression as blank as fresh snow.

It was an impasse, between a righteous man raised to keep the Dead down, and a Dead man and his sister.

Life and Death and Life again.

Wei Wuxian moved to intercept. But the tense stillness between all three of them was broken, unexpectedly, before he reached them. "Jie- Jiejie?"

Wen Qing turned so fast she almost gave herself whiplash. "A-Ning?"

For the first time in months, Wen Ning looked back at her with clear, dark eyes. "Jiejie."

"A-Ning!" she cried, and threw herself at him with so much force they both toppled to the ground.

He hugged her back, clumsy hands gentle against her back. "Jiejie, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," he mumbled into her hair, and she pulled back to fix him with a scowl.

"What do you have to be sorry for?"

"Sorry I took so long," he said, attempting a sheepish smile.

Her stern face crumpled, and she burst into tears. "You should be sorry!" she said, and continued her aggressive hug.

He gave a laugh that was more like a sob, and hugged her back.

The people all began to come out of hiding. They had all known Wen Ning, had loved him, and as they saw him among them once again, speaking and wrapped up with Wen Qing, they overcame their ingrained fear of the Dead to get closer. They were, for the most part, silent, before one of the uncles let out a great shout of joy.

“He’s back! He’s back! Wen Ning, it’s him, it’s him!”

As one, they rushed forward, all exclaiming with excitement.

Before they could reach him, Wei Wuxian stepped forward quickly, to the siblings’ side.

He set a hand on Wen Ning’s shoulder. After a second, Wen Ning looked up at him, and Wei Wuxian squatted down.

“How do you feel?” he asked. He was proud of how even the question out, unaffected, like he hadn’t spent months of sleepless nights, searching and searching for the spirit of the man in front of him.

“Like I want to cry,” Wen Ning said. “But I am unable to.”

“Hmm. You’re dead, remember? I doubt you can cry, anymore.”

“You brought me back,” Wen Ning said, and his eyes when he looked at Wei Wuxian were very dark. “But I got lost.”

And Wei Wuxian, too, found himself desperately wanting to cry. *I’m sorry, I’m so sorry*, he didn’t say. *It was my fault, I should have done more, I’m so sorry*.

“I got you back anyway, didn’t I?” he said instead, and clapped him on the shoulder as he rose, forcing a smile. “I’ll leave you with Wen Qing so she can cry on you some more, enough for both of you!”

“Oh, go fuck yourself,” Wen Qing said, sounding distinctly clogged up.

Wei Wuxian snorted, and turned. The Wen family all pressed in, and he pressed back through them, to the only still figure left.

“Lan Zhan,” he said. “Where’s a-Yuan?”

He nodded over to where an auntie stood with Wen Yuan on her shoulders, standing on her tiptoes to be able to see Wen Ning better.

He attempted a grin, and found, to his surprise, that it wasn’t so hard. “Huh. Cool. Well, Lan Zhan,” he said, turning back to him. “You’re here already, eh, so, uh. Tea?”

The two walked down the main road, only slightly charred from the Free Magic construct, towards the temple, and Wei Wuxian’s residence.

There was a rather large hole where the door had once been. The creature had clearly manifested in the old temple. But Wei Wuxian stepped, unconcerned, over the debris, and Lan Wangji followed.

He examined everything they walked past, all the loose bits of paper, covered in blood and drafts of magic, but they moved too fast for him to get more than a passing glimpse.

He did, however, pause uncertainly next to the Blood Pool. “Why... is there a pool of blood here?”

“Oh,” Wei Wuxian said, unruffled. “That’s the Blood Pool.”

Lan Wangji shot him an exasperated look. Wei Wuxian grinned. “In my defence, it didn’t use to be a pool of blood. But then all the Dead switched from appearing next to the broken stones to appearing in that, probably because of all the work I was doing in the temple here, so. Turned into the Blood Pool.” He shrugged, in a *what can you do?* sort of way.

Lan Wangji stared at him incredulously.

“Anyway!” Wei Wuxian said, clapping his hands. He continued moving, walking into the area where Wen Ning had lain for so many months. A fire was burning, somewhat incongruously for the middle of a summer afternoon, in a brazier, and Wei Wuxian lifted a pot of water onto it.

Lan Wangji stared at his back in silence for a few moments. “The presence of Free Magic is very heavy in this place.”

He showed no sign of it, but Lan Wangji felt the Free Magic presence like the onset of the flu, his head aching and his throat raw.

Wei Wuxian turned to look at him, and for a moment, in the dim, flickering light, Lan Wangji thought he saw a glimpse of his skull, ivory white and grinning.

But he blinked, and it was just Wei Wuxian’s too thin, too pale face.

“In the Burial Mound, or just in here? Because the first one really shouldn’t surprise you, with this place’s reputation.”

“In here,” Lan Wangji clarified quietly.

“Well, I have to keep all the Dead that come through in check somehow, right?” he replied, somewhat manically, but seemed to deflate at the look on Lan Wangji’s face. “Right?”

“Use Charter Magic.”

Wei Wuxian snorted bitterly. “Have you tried using Charter Magic here? It’s not easy, with the stones broken.”

“Better than the alternative.”

“What, death?”

They stared at each other.

“Can you really control this?” Lan Wangji asked, resigned and almost pleading.

“You think I can’t control this? I brought Wen Ning’s consciousness back months after he died, you think that was an accident? You think I got lucky?”

“You are skilled, Wei Ying, I knew that already,” Lan Wangji said, frustration leaking into his characteristic monotone. “But what is it costing you, to do these things, to control them? What will happen if Wen Ning loses consciousness again?”

“He won’t, but even if he did, I’ve dealt with him this long,” Wei Wuxian said dismissively. “As long as nothing happens to him and to me at the same time, it’ll be fine.”

“And what if something does?”

“It won’t.”

“How can you be certain?”

“It won’t, okay, because it can’t!”

“Are you really going to live like this?” Lan Wangji asked, his voice and patience fraying like an old rope.

“What, here?” Wei Wuxian said, and looked around mockingly. “My place not good enough for you? Come on, this mountain is even bigger than the Cloud Recesses, surely that counts for something?”

The pot of water, forgotten on the brazier, started to boil. They looked over, then back at each other. Lan Wangji couldn’t help but notice the deep shadows under Wei Wuxian’s eyes. How he looked so tired.

“Wei Ying,” he sighed. “You know what I mean.”

Wei Wuxian sighed as well, and gave a reluctant smile. “Lan Zhan, you really are impressively good at keeping the conversation on track.”

He was, however, saved from continuing it. Wen Qing, Wen Ning, and Wen Yuan walked in, Wen Yuan clinging to Wen Ning’s leg.

But when he saw the other two, he immediately abandoned his post, and ran over to hug Wei Wuxian’s leg. “What are you guys doing in here?” Wei Wuxian asked, lifting his leg, and Wen Yuan, up, then swinging him into his arms. “Already finished your weeping and wailing?”

“I’ll make you weep and wail!” Wen Qing said, her red eyes making the threat more menacing.

Wei Wuxian still decided to push it. “Oh yeah? How’re you gonna do that?”

She took out her left hand from behind her back, showing three glinting silver needles.

“Oh shit, Lan Zhan, hide me,” Wei Wuxian said, and dived, Wen Yuan and all, behind Lan Wangji’s broad back. He got on his tiptoes to stage whisper into his ears. “She’s a cruel women, our Wen Qing, truly a vicious creatures. She’ll gut you sooner than cure you, truly an abysmal quality in a healer...”

“You think this is cruel? Because I can show you cruelty you’ve never even heard of!”

“There’s nothing crueler than a woman’s heart,” he purred into Lan Wangji’s ear, who Wei Wuxian was honestly surprised hadn’t rolled his eyes and moved yet. “And I have no desire to see *that*.” Instead, Lan Wangji stood, solid as a mountain, though goosebumps had popped up, unseen, all over his body.

Wei Wuxian, apparently forgetting to hide, suddenly darted out to stand in front of Wen Ning.

“You! You’ve been hiding behind your sister again!” he said, and seemed quite amused by it.

Wen Ning stuttered slightly. “So - sorry, Wei-gongzi.” He looked past him as Wei Wuxian waved the apology off, then bowed, stiff and proper, to Lan Wangji. “Lan-er-gongzi.”

Wen Qing’s eyes, dark and inky, focused on Lan Wangji as well. “Hanguang-jun. Have a seat?”

“Oh, that’s what I forgot to offer!” Wei Wuxian said, snapping his fingers. “But there’s nowhere to sit?”

“Of course there is,” Wen Qing, and swept all the various papers and items on the nearby table and chairs cleanly onto the ground.

Wei Wuxian gasped in betrayal. “My things!”

Wen Ning went behind them and pulled the boiling pot off the flames. “Uh, I could make the, um. Tea?”

“We don’t have any tea leaves.”

“Oh shit, I forgot that!” Wei Wuxian exclaimed. “Sorry, Lan Zhan, we’ll have some for you for the next time you visit.”

“Oh, like you couldn’t have gotten some when you went into town today,” said Wen Qing. “You didn’t even get any radishes like I asked! What useless things did you get instead?”

“Buying toys for a-Yuan isn’t useless,” Wei Wuxian said, sticking his nose up in the air. “The poor child never gets any toys, and I, out of the goodness of my heart —”

“But Xian-gege didn’t buy me the butterflies?” Wen Yuan interjected, innocently traitorous. “The other brother bought them for me!”

Wei Wuxian’s face dropped into a perfect ‘o’ at the betrayal. “A-Yuan?” He wailed. “Where is the loyalty?”

He burst into laughter a second later though, and the siblings joined in. The joy rang throughout the temple, bright and unexpected like a streak of sunlight through a heavily clouded sky.

Lan Wangji turned, and walked out, as slow and poised as he ever was.

“Lan Zhan?” Wei Wuxian called, confused and uncertain. Wen Qing and Wen Ning turned as well, both with identically furrowed brows.

His steps faltered. But there was no inflection in his voice as he said, “It is time for me to leave,” and kept walking.

Wen Yuan frowned. “Gege?” he called, and started to run after him. He had never had good experiences with people leaving.

Wei Wuxian scooped him up as he half jogged passed, slowing to Lan Wangji’s sedate pace as he caught up.

“You’re leaving?” he asked.

Lan Wangji’s mouth worked over an answer, but Wei Wuxian didn’t want him to confirm it. “I’ll walk you out, then.”

From under Wei Wuxian’s arm, Wen Yuan spoke up. “Gege, you won’t be eating with us?”

Lan Wangji looked over at them for the first time, and, very gently, tucked a strand of hair behind Wen Yuan’s ear. He brightened, taking it as confirmation.

“I heard there’ll be lots of good food tonight!” he continued cheerfully.

“He has good food waiting for him in his own home,” Wei Wuxian said, sounding very tired when compared to Wen Yuan. “He won’t stay.”

“Oh,” he said, small and sad, and buried his face in Wei Wuxian’s shoulder.

They walked in silence to the base of the mountain, where the water gleamed, slick and dark as an oil spill.

They stopped, as one.

“Lan Zhan, you asked me if I really intended to live like this,” Wei Wuxian said, staring out across the water. He gave a half smile. “Though maybe you were really asking the opposite, I don’t know.”

He looked at Lan Wangji, and found him looking back, half his face silvered by the moon.

“But my question for you in return is this - how else can I live?”

Lan Wangji stayed silent. Wei Wuxian’s eyes were glittering as he looked at him.

“What can I do, apart from this?” he continued, anguish creeping into his voice, though his smile remained. “Give up necromancy? How will I keep the people on this mountain safe from the Dead that come through here into Life? Give up Free Magic? How will I keep the people on this mountain safe from the living who want to hurt them? Give *them* up?” He paused for breath, and to fight back tears. “You know I can’t do that. If you were in my shoes, you wouldn’t either.”

He paused, and searched Lan Wangji’s face. Beneath his blank mask, beneath his resignation, beneath his regret, Wei Wuxian could see understanding, perfect and clean. With the grimness of inevitability, he continued.

“There is no black and white. There is no clean answer. I cannot walk the broad, sunlit road, and protect those I need to protect. I can only —”

His voice broke, and he turned away. “Walk along the river of the Dead,” Lan Wangji finished for him.

Wei Wuxian gave a joyless smile. “Does the walker choose the path, or the path choose the walker?” he said, quick and rhythmic, like he was quoting a childhood song, half remembered. “Thank you for today,” he continued, more seriously. “For keeping me company, for a-Yuan, and for telling me of shijie’s marriage.”

Then he raised his chin, and looked Lan Wangji dead in the eye. “But this is my path to walk. I cannot stray from it, I cannot fail to control it, without losing everything. I know what I must do and I will do it.”

It was a goodbye. And Lan Wangji, as he sailed back across the still, dark water, tried not to wonder why every farewell of theirs sounded like their last.

Chapter End Notes

A reunion and a goodbye.

can you feel it? the knowledge of what is to come, pressing down upon you?

Chapter Notes

Ref. for Chinese [terms](#).

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Wei Wuxian, was, fundamentally, a man who loved people, and life, and family. The Death and death he had rained down during the war had been induced by a man recently emerged from Death, in enough pain and with enough power to reduce all the Living world to ruin and decay.

It was a strange man, who could step away from that power, and begin to grow turnips.

It was a man that no one believe existed.

The news that Wei Wuxian had resurrected a long dead corpse, giving it consciousness, intelligence, and immense strength, tore through the sects like a tsunami through a seaside village. It was received almost unanimously with horror and panic.

Most believed that there would be more - more and more Dead would be summoned and turned intelligent and extraordinarily strong, until there was an army of them. And Wei Wuxian, Lord of the Dead, Yiling Patriarch of necromancy, would march upon the sects and destroy them utterly.

Wei Wuxian, swinging his legs against the crate he was perched on top of, stacked on top of many other crates, on top of a wagon, which was being hauled up the mountain of the Burial Mound by Wen Ning with a truly incredible amount of ease, was not entirely unaware of these rumours.

He was, however, not particularly concerned by them. He was known, in Yiling, mostly as the grubby man that bargained too hard for potatoes. His friend, who he started bringing after a few months, was known as that “sort of grey looking fellow.” Wen Ning was looked on, by most men, with envy over his immense shows of strength, and, by most of the ladies, with an admiration they never showed Wei Wuxian. He was known to most, more succinctly, as “the skinny guy.”

Wei Wuxian, of course, complained of this at length with Wen Ning on every trip up the mountain. Wen Ning listened with a tolerant tilt to his head.

“Honestly, I don’t know why the ladies don’t love me!” Wei Wuxian moaned, falling back onto the pile of potatoes with his arm covering his eyes dramatically. “I’m so handsome! Wen

Ning, tell me I'm handsome?"

"You're very handsome," Wen Ning said obediently, though amusement coloured his voice bright.

"None know how I suffer," Wei Wuxian said, as he lay comfortably atop a wagon he was definitely not pulling. Wen Ning snorted, and beneath his hand Wei Wuxian's grin spread, brilliant and sharp, over his face.

Neither of them mentioned the talk around town of the "Yiling Patriarch."

On one of their trips back to the Burial Mound, they came across a group of people clustered along the bank of the channel. Wei Wuxian sat up straight and gripped Chenqing tight in his fist.

He frowned and tilted his head when he realised he couldn't feel the Charter coming off them, glittering and painful like the glint of sun off snow. Like it was when he was around Lan Wangji. He stretched out his senses, and breathed in the Free Magic, dark, hot, and familiar. Necromancers.

His grip on Chenqing did not relax.

But they made no move towards him, just watched him approach with disinterest. He hopped down from the wagon, more casually than he felt, and sauntered up to them.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, as friendly and as open as he could manage.

"Oh, we're waiting for the Yiling Patriarch! It is said that he lives in this mountain, that he is taking on disciples, that he is starting his own sect! And we are going to be apart of it!"

"Ah," Wei Wuxian said. "Good luck with that."

He moved the boat to a different part of the channel, and took a different route from then on into Yiling.

It was only a week after Lan Wangji's visit, when Wei Wuxian was again in town with Wen Ning beside him, that he came across someone else looking for him. He caught a glimpse of keen, blinding Charter magic from the corner of his eye, and turned sharply. Jiang Cheng looked out from thick, lowered brows and a ridiculous, lowered hat, and, in the way of siblings, Wei Wuxian felt both completely blindsided, and utterly unsurprised.

Jiang Cheng turned to go, and Wei Wuxian followed. Wen Ning followed as well, a shadowy man's shadow.

They arrived at a small, walled-in yard, and went through the gate. Jiang Cheng looked at Wen Ning coldly, and said, with the most contempt he could muster, "Get out."

Wen Ning retreated to stand guard outside the gate.

Wei Wuxian would have, perhaps, had something to say about this treatment of his friend, had his gaze had not been caught on the woman in the yard. “Shijie,” he whispered, and the figure turned.

She took off her dark cloak, her bamboo hat lined with gauze, and beneath those coverings were wedding robes of scarlet.

Jiang Yanli wore her hair in an intricate style, with her vivid robes finely embroidered, and her cheeks brightly rouged. She smiled at him, brilliant and tremulous.

“Shijie,” Wei Wuxian said, throat closing up. “You’re, today, you’re...”

“No, she just got dressed up for fun,” Jiang Cheng said snidely.

“You can fuck off,” Wei Wuxian said, and began to cry as he walked over to let his sister envelope him in a hug. His hands hovered over her back; he didn’t want to dirty those robes.

“A-Xian,” she said, voice soft and thick, “I know we always talked of my wedding, of us all being there together, celebrating together, but. At least we can be together now, for a little while.”

Tears streamed down Wei Wuxian’s face. He tried his best not to get any on her robes.

Jiang Yanli, with her makeup all done, blinked and blinked as she tried not to ruin it.

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Jiang Cheng said as he swiped at the water on his own cheeks.

All of them were sniffing as Wei Wuxian took a step back, and gave a fragile smile.

“I’m sorry I’m the only one here,” Jiang Yanli said, giving a wobbly smile back. “You won’t be able see the groom.”

“Thank the Charter,” Wei Wuxian muttered in an aside to Jiang Cheng, who snorted. Jiang Yanli rolled her eyes.

Wei Wuxian grinned, and looked at her with gentle eyes. “You look lovely, shijie. That peacock won’t know what’s hit him when he sees you.”

“That’s what I said, a-jie, it really does look good!” Jiang Cheng chimed in.

“It doesn’t count if you two say it,” she sighed, giving a small grin of her own. “You’d both lie in a heartbeat to make me feel better.”

“You won’t believe me, and you won’t believe him. Will you only believe it when it comes from a certain other man?”

He gave an evil grin, and Jiang Yanli blushed. She switched topics quickly. “A-Xian, give me a courtesy name.”

“What courtesy name?”

“Of your future nephew,” Jiang Cheng said, as if it were obvious.

Wei Wuxian grinned, and glanced at Jiang Yanli, who blushed harder than ever. Then he put his finger to his lips and tapped in exaggerated thought.

“Well, the next generation of the Lanling Jin Sect is Ru, right? How about Jin Rulan?”

“Oh, that’s pretty!” Jiang Yanli said, looking pleased.

“It sounds like he’s from the Lan Sect though,” Jiang Cheng complained. “Why should a child of the Jiang and Jin sects have ‘Lan’ in his name?”

“Why not? The Lan flower is a distinguished flower, the Lan Sect is a distinguished sect.”

“That’s not what you’ve said about them in the past,” Jiang Cheng said, raising his eyebrows.

“Oh, shut it, I’m the one giving the name, the ones *not* giving the name just need be quiet and accept their position in life as the not name-giver.”

“That doesn’t even make sense!” Jiang Cheng yelled, and Jiang Yanli, who had been rolling her eyes in the background, said, “Enough. A-Cheng, it was your idea in the first place to have him give the courtesy name. Stop needling. Now, I brought soup, so wait a second while I fetch it.”

Wei Wuxian shot Jiang Cheng a look that said *On her wedding day?* and Jiang Cheng gave a shrug that said, *Have you met out sister?*

Jiang Yanli came back, and gave them each a bowl. Then, she went to the gate, and poked her head out. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know you were coming,” she said to a baffled Wen Ning, who had been standing guard. “Or I would have made more. But there’s still enough for a bowl,” she said sweetly, and, smiling, handed one to him.

“Um,” he said. If he had had a heartbeat, he would have been blushing. “There, there’s enough for me?”

She nodded, still smiling. Jiang Cheng grumbled over his inclusion, but was quickly overruled.

“Then, thank you so much Jiang-guniang, thank you!” Wen Ning said, and held the bowl carefully in his cupped palms. He did not, however, start eating.

“To the Yiling Patriarch,” Jiang Cheng toasted, and Wei Wuxian smacked him on the shoulder.

“God, that’s the *worst* title,” he groaned. “Seriously, they couldn’t come up with anything better?”

“Lord of the Dead?”

“Fuck,” he said, and started eating. For a time he was silent, savouring the taste of his childhood.

“So,” Jiang Cheng said, somewhat awkwardly. “How’s your, uh, stomach?”

“Huh?”

“You know. From our fight.”

“Oh, when you stabbed me?”

“Hey, you broke my arm first!”

“And then you fucking stabbed me!”

“Okay, and how long did it take you to heal?”

“Uh. A week?”

“I had my arm in a sling for over a month!”

“Well,” Wei Wuxian said, taking a bite of lotus root and grinning. “I had to make it look realistic. Besides, it was your left arm!”

Jiang Cheng glared at him, eating his soup like he had a vendetta against it. He glanced to the gate, where Jiang Yanli still stood, conversing pleasantly with Wen Ning.

“You’re really going to stay here, like this?” he asked. “With all the cultivation world baying for your blood?”

“No one has yet dared cross the divide into the Burial Mound. I’ll be fine as long as I don’t stir up trouble.”

“Even if it were possible for Wei Wuxian himself not to stir up trouble,” he paused and raised his eyebrows at the improbability of the statement, before sobering, “you think it’ll matter? Trouble around your name is stirring up all by itself, and it won’t be long before it finds the source.”

“I don’t care if it finds me,” Wei Wuxian said coldly. “They already know where I am. Let them come, and they’ll find the trouble they’re looking for.”

“You never listen to me,” Jiang Cheng said, voice icy compared to the hot frustration of the moment before. “But you’ll realise who was right, one day.”

“Are you done yet?” Wei Wuxian said, looking away, strands of black fluttering around his face. He did not say, *I already know who is right*, because they both knew it, and they both knew it would make no difference.

Jiang Cheng drank the leftover soup with one gulp and stood in the same motion. “We won’t see you off. We obviously can’t be seen with you.”

Wei Wuxian took no offence. He knew they had both risked a lot to come here.

“We’ll go first,” he said, and got to his feet, finishing the soup with regret.

Jiang Yanli looked over, and his heart ached. “You look beautiful, and the ceremony will be perfect, I know it will,” he said, smiling down at her and giving her another hug. “Thank you for the soup,” he said softly into her intricate hairstyle, because he couldn’t apologise.

She pulled back, and gave him a heartbreaking smile. “You’re welcome,” she said.

She tugged him down and kissed him on the forehead, just above his Charter mark. He closed his eyes at the touch, three tears trickling down.

Wei Wuxian left, almost unseeing through his tears. They were therefore some way from the village before he noticed what Wen Ning was doing.

“Why are you still carrying the soup?” he asked, confused and congested.

“Oh, well, I can’t drink it,” Wen Ning said. “So, I thought I’d bring back some for a-Yuan. Do you think it’ll still be nice cold?”

Wei Wuxian snorted and grinned. “Yeah, I’ve had it cold plenty of times. I’m sure he’ll love it.”

The sun was high in the sky, and Wen Ning moved slowly, weakened by its piercing rays, as all Dead things were. His careful hold on the bowl, however, did not waver. Wei Wuxian turned his gaze ahead, still smiling, salt like crystals of ice dried stiff on his face. The mountain where the Wen family lived made a dark outline against the dizzying, infinite blue of the sky. Perhaps he would not see his sister’s wedding, or either of his siblings for a long time. But for now, at least, he was not entirely without family.

Chapter End Notes

I think the beginning scene would happen, chronologically, some time after the scene with the Jiang siblings, but this was the canon order, and I liked it enough to keep it! Speaking of canon, writing fanfiction makes you very aware of the plot holes in the original 😊

they'll find the trouble they're looking for

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A year passed. Wei Wuxian, unable to heal the Charter stones, decided to simply get rid of them. The door to Death in the Burial Mound remained, for too much Death had happened there for it to disappear entirely, but Wei Wuxian thought it was, if not locked, at least tentatively closed.

His villagers were greatly relieved, at least, for the change of atmosphere. The more proficient of them in Charter were able to once again create small spells, and the sky, for the others, was cleared.

The Charter, Life, crept ever so slowly back. They worked, and built, and farmed, and grew. They sold their excess at the markets, Wen Qing healed any that fell sick, Wen Ning did a great deal of heavy lifting, and Aunt Four made fruit wine, which Wei Wuxian found to be delightfully strong.

Wei Wuxian was, like all of them, busy. He worked on warding, on necromancy, on cleansing, on the opposite, on farming, he played the flute for the Dead and for Wen Yuan, he tutored him and he played with him.

The year passed swiftly and peacefully. He did not hear from his brother, sister, or from Lan Wangji. Wei Wuxian, as he attempted to grow lotus plants in a muddy pond in the Burial Mound, tried not to think about it.

The announcement and invitation in one came from a rather trembling Jin disciple. Wen Ning, the recipient, looked at the elaborate gold paper of the invitation in quiet bemusement.

“See, see that it is received by, by the Yiling Patriarch, Wei Wuxian!” the Jin disciple stuttered out, and promptly fled in a blur of yellow robes.

Wen Ning attempted to raise an eyebrow, and failed, because he was dead. He did, however, deliver it to Wei Wuxian, his sister looking on nosily.

“It’s definitely a trap,” she said confidently.

Wei Wuxian gaped at her. “It was sent by my sister!” He looked at Wen Ning for support.

He looked a little awkward, before shrugging. “I mean, it could be.”

“Hey! According to the world, you’re my mighty and fearsome servant. You’re meant to be on my side and always agree with me!”

“You brought my consciousness back,” Wen Ning said in a serious manner. “For which I will always be grateful. However, that also means that I am intelligent enough to never disagree with jiejie.”

“Why do you guys always gang up on me?” Wei Wuxian exclaimed, and collapsed dramatically against the nearest wall.

“Anyway,” he continued, recovering abruptly when the siblings just looked on, unimpressed. “I’m going to go see my nephew, and there’s nothing either of you can do to stop me.”

“Have you considered... sneaking in? Rather than just, um. Walking right in on Jin Rulan’s one month celebration?”

“I was invited! And Wen Ning, you are now *uninvited* as my plus one.”

“If you really, desperately want to die,” Wen Qing said, sounding resigned. “You are absolutely not going without bringing a-Ning.”

“What, you want him to die too?”

“Jiejie, you’re just going to let him go?”

“Well, there’s nothing I can do to stop him once he’s made his mind up,” Wen Qing replied, ignoring Wei Wuxian’s question. “And though I think it is possibly a trap, I really,” she sighed, “don’t think the possibility is overly high. The Jin Sect would lose a lot of face, setting you up like that.”

Wei Wuxian grinned, delight at getting his way all over his face.

“But,” she continued severely. “You are taking Wen Ning, because we are not idiots!”

“Speak for yourself,” Wei Wuxian replied cheerfully.

The celebration was in less than a month, and in that time, Wei Wuxian was rarely seen, holed up in his workshop, feverishly toiling away on one of his projects.

It was only when he and Wen Ning were on the road that he learned what Wei Wuxian had been working on.

“Well, I had to get him a gift,” Wei Wuxian said, and pulled out a small wooden box. He opened it, and pulled out an even smaller silver bell, his fingers holding the clapper steady so that it made no noise. It was beautiful, and old, engraved with a striking nine-petaled lotus.

But Wen Ning breathed, “Oh, wow,” when he saw it, and it was not because of the craftsmanship.

Free Magic and Charter Magic entwined around the outside, powerful spells of sleep and rest infusing the metal.

“It’s like your flute,” he said. He almost reached out to touch it, a little mesmerised by the shifting light on silver, but Wei Wuxian held it out of reach.

“It’s made to slow down the Dead, subdue them, put them to sleep,” he said. “It probably won’t harm you, but better to be safe, and all that.”

Wen Ning made himself look away with an effort, and Wei Wuxian slipped it back into its box. "A powerful gift," he commented quietly.

"Ranna, the Sleepbringer," Wei Wuxian said, almost dreamily. "Thought it might be an appropriate gift for a newborn." He smiled, and continued in almost an undertone, "I hope... it will keep him safe."

"In any case," he said, switching to a playful smirk. "All his other uncles, with all their pretty, useless trinkets, will have to bow down before mine!"

"Please, just, remember, we are attending Jin-gongzi's full month celebration, so. Please try to be polite, and not start any fights... jieje is counting on me."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous," Wei Wuxian said, waving his hand around airily. "I can behave myself for shijie's sake. I'll even be nice to Jin Zixuan because he invited me! I won't talk shit about him for an entire year, that's how nice I'll be!"

Towards noon, Wen Ning started to flag, for all Dead struggled under the sun. All Dead also, of course, struggled to cross moving water. Wen Ning was immensely strong to be able to do both, but even he had his limits.

They were close to the site where Wen Ning had died, Qionqi path, and stopped to let Wen Ning, and by extension, Wei Wuxian, rest. He fell asleep after eating lunch, with Wen Ning keeping watch.

But as a consequence, they lost quite a bit of time. The sun was close to setting, and the valley they walked through in deep shadow, by the time they passed through it.

It were still quite a popular road, though. There should have been more travellers on it, hurrying to reach their destinations before dark. But the two of them were alone.

Both of them noticed it, and they gave each other wary side glances.

"Can you feel any Dead?" Wei Wuxian asked, not expecting a confirmation. He had already reached out, far and wide, with his senses. There was nothing. Nothing but Life.

"No," Wen Ning murmured, like he didn't want to break the stillness. "All is quiet."

"It is. Too quiet."

A faint whistling was all the warning Wei Wuxian got, but Wen Ning was quicker on the uptake. An arrow appeared in his hand as if summoned, point inches from Wei Wuxian's chest.

They looked up, as one. On the mountain path above them there stood dozens, perhaps hundreds, of cultivators. Some glowed with Charter magic, some held bows, but they were all armed and armoured, and all were looking down at the two slim, dark figures below them.

A man stood at the front, the Jin Sect's peony displayed proudly on his yellow robes. He held a bow that had clearly just loosed an arrow.

“Who are you?” Wei Wuxian called out, a little baffled.

The man’s mouth hung open. He had obviously been working his way up to a speech, but he forgot it in favour of replying, indignantly, “Seriously? We’ve met, like, quite a few times?” And then, looking behind him at the assembled cultivators, he seemed to gather himself.

“I am Jin Zixun!”

Wei Wuxian frowned and shrugged a little. He could hazily remember his shijie masterfully taking the man down a peg or two a few years ago. It had been incredible to watch. Jiang Yanli had been both excruciatingly polite and brilliantly cutting the entire time she was doing it, and Jin Zixun was reduced to looking like the idiot he was.

Wei Wuxian couldn’t quite remember the reason she had intervened, but it must have been for a grave insult. Jiang Yanli’s reputation as shy and perfectly polite did not come unearned.

But Wei Wuxian could truly not recall a reason for him to be there now.

“Oh,” he said, a little vaguely. “Didn’t my shijie yell at you that one time?”

Jin Zixun spluttered, his face turning a glaring red. He stomped a foot, and yelled, “Wei Wuxian! I’m warning you - stop pretending you don’t know me, and lift this curse from my body! Maybe then I’ll let you go!”

Wei Wuxian squinted up at him. “Huh? What curse?”

“Oh, you’re going to pretend you don’t know? Like we’d believe that innocent act from the Yiling Patriarch!”

“Uh. Seriously, what curse? Also, like, I don’t really do curses? And if I did, I’d do them on someone I knew enough to dislike?”

“We’ve met three times before!” Jin Zixun roared, and ripped open his robes. “Look at what your curse has done to me!”

“Yikes,” Wei Wuxian said. “You really ought to get that looked at.”

“I am showing it now,” he declared. “to the one who cursed me with it. So that he may lift it, before he comes to regret it!”

“Regret it?” Wei Wuxian said, tilting his head. He smiled, just a little. “How will you make me do that?”

“I will kill you, burn your Ghost General to ash, then raze the rest of your pathetic Wen-dog army down to the ground!”

If Wei Wuxian had been in another situation, he would have laughed and repeated *Ghost General?* with hysterical scorn.

But he was in this situation. He watched as Jin Zixun lifted his hand, and the archers readied their bows and arrows as if in slow motion, the bows ticking up one, two, three, like dominoes falling in reverse.

Before they could fire, he lifted Chenqing to his mouth, and blew. The single note ripped apart the silence of the valley. But nothing answered the call; everything remained frozen. Still.

“Hah,” Jin Zixun said, smiling nastily. “Looking to make more innocent corpses into your unholy abominations? Call all you like, nothing will respond. I had my men dig all of the dead out. There is nothing but Life, and the Charter, in this valley!”

Even if that was true, which, Wei Wuxian thought wearily, it wasn’t, it didn’t matter. Clearly, this had been premeditated to a degree he hadn’t even thought possible.

Wen Ning looked at him. “Play *Belgaer* in reverse,” he said. “Like you did in that experiment a few weeks ago.”

Wei Wuxian, fury in his veins and nothing but enemies in his sight, did not tell him it was too dangerous.

He trusted Wen Ning.

He nodded, and put Chenqing once again to his lips.

He began playing, the notes strange, stupefying, almost hypnotic. Wen Ning’s eyes went, for a moment, a misty grey, like they were covered with cobwebs. Then they cleared, to be replaced with fire.

Wen Ning roared into the sky like he wanted to bring it down. And for a second it appeared like the dusk blue sky really was falling. Then the dark shape resolved into the hundreds of arrows loosed by the cultivators. They glowed, bespelled by the Charter mages for deadly aim.

Wen Ning, faster than the eye could see, slammed into a boulder, breaking it in half, lifting it above his head and throwing it in front of Wei Wuxian. The crack of the arrows ramming into it echoed throughout the valley.

The cultivators, while they were distracted, climbed down the valley walls. Roaring their own battle cries, they charged en masse.

Wen Ning met them, head-on.

The bells, the coolest part of being a necromancer in the Old Kingdom! I reread this scene from GDC, and almost couldn't believe that Wei Wuxian's bell for Jin Ling was a silver bell, just like the ones in Sabriel!

Ranna, Sleeper, the smallest bell, is explained in text, but Belgaer, Thinker, is another bell from the novels. It is the thinking bell, one that often seeks to ring of its own accord. It can restore to the Dead independent thought, memories, all the patterns of a Living mind, or erase them. Wei Wuxian hasn't made the bell yet, just played the melody of it, and it was this he worked on for months to restore Wen Ning's memory and consciousness. Played backwards, however, it reverted him back to the mindless strength he had before his spirit's restoration.

If you want to know anything more about the seven bells, you can find more information [here](#).

don't you ever tame your demons, but always keep 'em on a leash

Chapter Notes

Title from Arsonist's Lullaby - Hozier.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Wei Wuxian stayed behind, and started walking backwards. His eyes were on Wen Ning, but he still managed to, with a neat sidestep, dodge a vicious sword swipe aimed for his neck.

Jin Zixun scowled as Wei Wuxian pivoted to face him. It was a cowardly move, to attempt to kill Wei Wuxian using the distraction of his fellow cultivators fighting, and losing, to one corpse. Both of them were aware of it.

Jin Zixun sneered in an attempt to regain his equilibrium. “Your little flute is useless,” he scoffed. “And you don’t even carry a sword. This is the price you will pay for your arrogance.”

He raised his sword in both hands like an executioner.

With a flick of his wrist, and the burn of Free Magic on his lips, Wei Wuxian dimmed the light of the Charter-infused weapon to a shadow.

Jin Zixun flinched, and struggled slightly to lift his sword. But he managed, nonetheless, to raise it, and attacked. Wei Wuxian dodged the first swipe, then dodged again, and again.

It was a strange fight, almost even. Wei Wuxian’s cold smile did not leave his face, and he remained pale and contained. But he also had no sword, and so no easy way to win. The Charter sword was powerful, even with his muffling spell, and without being able to summon Dead, Wei Wuxian was severely handicapped.

Occasionally, when he could not dodge fast enough, he would bring his flute up to block the sword. It would hold, though each blow caused a note to ring out, sharp and wrong, which lingered in the air.

The third time he did this, something flew out of his sleeve. It was the wooden box containing Jin Rulan’s bell.

It looked very small in Jin Zixun’s large, square hand.

“What’s this?” he said, sounding alarmed at the potential of it being some sort of magical weapon. Then he looked more closely, at the small, carved characters on it, Jin Rulan’s name and date of birth.

He gave a slow smile, and looked up to view the shock and panic skitter across Wei Wuxian's face.

A hundred paces away, Wen Ning battled against a hundred soldiers, the screams and shouts of the fierce and injured almost deafening. But Wei Wuxian and Jin Zixuan stood still for a moment, frozen in their own little bubble of silence.

Jin Zixun was the one to shatter it. "Did you really think," he said, voice oozing false sympathy, "that they would let you attend a-Ling's one month celebration? The Yiling Patriarch, Lord of the Dead?" he spat on the ground. "Nobody's going to let you within a mile of him."

Tremors vibrated through Wei Wuxian's body from the tension he held in every muscle. Chenqing creaked in his grip.

He was mere moments from attacking when he heard a "Stop!" The sound of galloping hooves belatedly entered his hearing.

A horse appeared between them, and a figure, robed in white-gold, leaped from its back. Wei Wuxian remained wary, feeling like a black alley cat, fur all on end. But the figure had jumped down facing Jin Zixun, and all the fury on his face was directed that way.

"What do you think you're doing?" he yelled, and when he turned slightly, Wei Wuxian recognised with a start the profile of his brother-in-law.

"Zixuan, what are you doing here?" Jin Zixun asked, looking almost as surprised as Wei Wuxian.

"You know why I'm here!"

"A-Yao told you."

"If not for my interrogation of him when I noticed him looking strange, I would never have known about this ambush! Are you not ashamed of yourself? Why didn't you tell me of your curse, instead of planning this, this, this madness!"

Jin Zixun could not tell him the truth - that not only had he been too ashamed, but that it had also not been his idea, or his planning, in the first place.

So he opted for defence. "Zixuan, please, just hide this from your wife for now, I'll give you both a formal apology once I'm free from this hideous curse!"

"Who says it's Wei Wuxian who gave it to you? You're acting like a child, pointing fingers at the first person you thought could have done it! Don't you know that I was the one to invite him to a-Ling's full month celebration in the first place? If you kill him, where does that leave me and my reputation? Where does it leave my wife?"

"We both know he would have ruined it anyway! Whatever he touches turns foul and rotten. When you first invited him, didn't you fear what he would do, that you, your wife, your son, would be blackened by his presence?"

“I am more worried right now,” Jin Zixuan said, breathing heavily. “That our reputation will be stained by you.”

Jin Zixun snorted like a bull, his face turning red with rage. He clenched his hands into fists, and the sound of cracking wood came from one of them. He opened his hand, eyes still locked with his cousin’s, and let the pieces of Wei Wuxian’s gift to his nephew fall from it with casual contempt.

Wei Wuxian closed his eyes as if he had been slapped. The glint of the silver bell falling to the ground amidst the splinters of wood went unnoticed, and the single note it made, low and sweet, went unheard over the sounds of fighting. Jin Zixuan was strong, but his strength could not compete with the spells woven into the bell. But Wei Wuxian did not notice, and when his eyes opened again, they glowed as if lit from within. He lunged at Jin Zixun.

Jin Zixuan had honestly kind of forgotten Wei Wuxian’s presence. He also had no way of knowing what Jin Zixun had destroyed. The charge therefore almost blindsided him.

But he was also a trained, veteran warrior, and Jin Zixun was his cousin. He blocked the attack automatically.

“Wei Wuxian!” he exclaimed. “What is the meaning of this?”

Wei Wuxian just gasped shakily, chest heaving against Jin Zixuan’s sword arm, eyes wild and fixed on Jin Zixun.

“I was defending you!” Jin Zixuan said, sounding almost disgusted. “Look, you know what, you need to call off Wen Ning. His rampage is only making matters worse!”

His voice rough, eyes unwavering, Wei Wuxian said, “Call your men off first.”

“Charter, you always have to argue, you always have to be in the right,” Jin Zixuan burst out. “Why must you be so stubborn? Can’t you see what sort of situation this is? Call off your, call off Wen Ning, and when everything calms down, you can follow me to Koi Tower, and explain everything! Then I’m sure things will get cleared up, including this,” he waved between the two men, “business.”

“You really don’t get it, do you?” Wei Wuxian said coldly. “As soon as I tell Wen Ning to stop, those spelled arrows will go straight for me.”

“They wouldn’t!” Jin Zixuan protested. “Those are Jin sect members!”

“Oh? And how can you make sure they wouldn’t?” Wei Wuxian said, trying for sarcasm but not succeeding around the tremble in his voice. “By fucking calling them off first. Honestly, Jin Zixuan, you’re the first fucking son of the Jin Sect. You really want me to believe that you knew nothing of their plan to kill me?”

Jin Zixuan gaped at him. “You, you, you’re insane if you think that, I would never —”

Wei Wuxian just shook his head, snorting bitterly. “Jin Zixuan,” he said coldly. “Move aside. I will not hurt you, but you’re not going to stop me.”

“Wei Wuxian!” he yelled, and pushed him. Wei Wuxian stumbled back a few paces, falling to the ground. “Why can you never listen to reason?” Jin Zixuan lunged towards him, reaching a hand out for the front of his robes. “A-Li is waiting —”

He paused, mouth working a little, his hand still reaching down. Wei Wuxian blinked up at Jin Zixuan as he felt a liquid splatter onto his face, still sprawled on the ground, his heart still racing with adrenaline.

It took him a few moments to even register what was wrong. Jin Zixuan’s mouth continued moving as if of its own volition, despite the gore covered hand that reached through his chest.

“— waiting for you at Koi Tower, for a-Ling’s full month celebration...”

The hand pulled back, and Jin Zixuan’s shock induced blankness shattered as his body contorted around the agony of it. Wen Ning appeared from behind him as he slid to the ground, his hand scarlet, and his eyes still filled with that awful, dirty fire.

Wei Wuxian caught him automatically, and together they sprawled on the ground as Wei Wuxian’s greatest achievement, his friend, loomed over him and the body of his brother-in-law. Wen Ning stared back, no recognition in his eyes. *Because*, came the one clear thought in Wei Wuxian’s blizzard filled brain, *of what I did to him*.

I did this.

Screams of shock and fear rung through the valley, as the cultivators saw their future sect leader’s blood pool beneath him.

“What are you waiting for?” Jin Zixun bellowed. “Kill him!”

They aimed their bows.

But before they could loose their arrows, Jin Zixun felt two hands close around his throat. The hands turned it sharply to the side, and, with a *crack*, his neck broke. He crumpled to the ground as Wen Ning dropped him.

But Wei Wuxian did not notice when Jin Zixun died. He could not bring himself to care. All he felt was a white emptiness.

Then Jin Zixuan died. And his death resounded through Wei Wuxian’s head like the crack of a whip, like the sharp shock of icy water going over his head. It snapped him from his shock, and he breathed in once, a huge gasp, unfreezing himself, then refreezing as he threw himself into Death.

The river welcomed him with a biting grip around his shins, but he barely felt it. Jin Zixuan was in Death almost precisely as he had been in life, kneeling almost at Wei Wuxian’s feet, the rushing waters tugging him insistently down. His eyes, as vacant with death as they were with shock and pain, started to slip closed, and he swayed back. Before the grey river could pull him down completely, Wei Wuxian lunged for him. With a mighty heave, he hauled him upright.

Hoisting his arm round his shoulder, Wei Wuxian snapped his fingers in front of Jin Zixuan's face a few times. The clicks rang out, a clean and sharp sound in this oddly muffled place. "Jin Zixuan. Jin Zixuan! Look at me."

Jin Zixuan blinked, and did. He closed his hand tight around a small silver bell, which he had not notice appear in his hand. "Wei Wuxian?" he slurred, and blinked again, looking around.

"Jin Zixuan," Wei Wuxian said again. "I need you to focus. We're going to go back, okay, we're going to go back, and I need you to want it, I need you to think of my shijie and your baby boy and want to be with them more than you've ever wanted anything in your life."

"This is Death," he replied, with an air of dawning realisation and horror. "I am, I'm dead. I can't go back. It's not right."

Wei Wuxian grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him roughly. "Leaving your wife and child, that's what isn't right! Just, just hold onto me, and, in your mind, hold the Charter marks for Life and Healing."

Jin Zixuan looked as if he were still going to argue, but Wei Wuxian crushed the front of his robes in his fists, like, perhaps, Jin Zixuan had wanted to do with him, just before he died.

"Please," Wei Wuxian begged, pleaded. "Please. For shijie, for your son. Go back for your son."

And Jin Zixuan looked down at him, eyes wide, and thought of his wife and child. With a surge of colour, life blazed up within him. He nodded, and Wei Wuxian gave a quick, sharp laugh, and without releasing his grip upon Jin Zixuan's robes, tugged him back towards the border of Life. He looked back at him, and Jin Zixuan, with more effort than he had ever had to employ, pictured the Charter Marks for Life and Healing. He nodded back, and with Wei Wuxian's sharp whistle, the two plunged again into Life.

Wei Wuxian shook the ice crystallised over him off quickly, like a dog shaking off water. He found he was, rather to his own surprise, in the arms of Wen Ning, who was galloping along back the way they came at a truly incredible rate. Wen Ning blinked down at him as he blinked up, looking both relieved and incredibly guilty.

Wei Wuxian cut him off before he could start apologising. "It wasn't your fault, it was mine, but we need to go back!" In a distant part of his mind not focused on the present catastrophe, he was impressed that Wen Ning had shaken off Chenqing's influence so quickly.

"To, to turn ourselves in, to the Jin Sect, Wei-gongzi?"

"No, I brought Jin Zixuan back from Death, now we just need to go get him so that he can be healed by Wen Qing."

"Not that I'm not relieved, Wei-gongzi, about Jin-gongzi, but I don't think it would be very easy, getting through the rest of the Jin disciples, to uh, kidnap their sect heir. After what I just did to him."

Wei Wuxian looked frustrated, and opened his mouth to argue. “Besides,” Wen Ning added hastily. “I’m sure they have their own, very capable healers. And everyone there was a Charter Mage, they’ll be able to stabilise him until they get to Koi Tower.”

Wei Wuxian set his mouth in a mulish pout. “None of their healers would be as good as Wen Qing.”

Wen Ning almost smiled. “No healer is as good as my jiejie.”

He let Wen Ning carry him for a while, his body limp and listless, feeling the exhaustion of his trip into Death lie heavily upon him.

“Wen Ning,” he murmured after a while.

“Yes?”

“I’m sorry.”

Wen Ning made to say something, but Wei Wuxian continued before he could. “I said I could control it. Control you. But I shouldn’t have been thinking in those terms, I shouldn’t have put you on the line like that. You deserve better.”

“Wei-gongzi, I —”

“If my shijie had been made a widow today, it would have been my fault,” Wei Wuxian said, and burst into tears.

He wept all the way back to the Burial Mound. Even once he passed out, exhausted from the battle, two thin rivers flowed, without interruption, down his face.

Chapter End Notes

I know this seems like a really sad chapter ending, but it has a... better end to it than canon? Also, to all my beloved commenters who begged me not to kill Jin Zixuan... he only died a little? To paraphrase Monty Python, he got better.

Also, I kind of lied with the Everybody Lives tag, because Wei Wuxian was definitely not up for resurrecting Jin Zixun, which... fair. Just imagine him floating by the two in Death while they have their heartfelt moment.

scooping flames from a forestfire

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

The attack at the Burial Mound came a week later. They knew it was coming. None of them had any way of knowing whether the Jin heir had survived or not, but they knew that it wouldn't matter. The attack would come regardless.

And so it did.

They marched up, an inexorable force, with the four incongruously colourful banners of the major sects displayed proudly.

They paused on the channel bank.

Wei Wuxian went down to meet them. Wei Wuxian was, perhaps, the true antithesis of diplomacy, but he could not let them cross the water. He had a home to defend.

The door of Death may have been closed in the Burial Mound, but it would not take much for it to open. Dead still patrolled the border, and Wei Wuxian wondered, with a sort of detached horror, what he would have them do to protect his people.

Wen Ning did not come with him. Neither of them thought his presence would aid diplomacy, and there were plenty of other Dead for Wei Wuxian to command.

Besides, Wei Wuxian thought, if I die, he will need to be the last line of defence.

He did not want to get close enough for their arrows or their magic to reach him, and he doubted they would hear a word he said if he attempted to shout across.

So, still cloaked in the shadows of the trees on the opposite bank of the army, he let Free Magic bubble up to fill his throat, and when he spoke, his voice boomed across the water, loud and terrible.

“Hey, guys, come here often?”

There seemed to be a mess of general confusion on the other bank, but Wei Wuxian realised belatedly that his brilliant plan may have allowed them to hear him, but not him to hear them.

“Win some, ya lose some,” he muttered to himself, then, projecting once more, said, “Uh, you should be able to do the same thing if you, like, combine some Charter marks, I would

recommend the marks for —”

“No, no, I’ve got it, I’ve got it, shut up,” came an unfamiliar voice. It was stuffy and irritated, the voice of an older man, and while Wei Wuxian’s voice was probably heard for miles around, this voice just barely made it to Wei Wuxian’s ears. *Jin Guangshan?* he wondered.

“Wei Wuxian!” the probable voice of Jin Guangshan yelled, though Wei Wuxian still struggled to hear it. “You have murdered my nephew, and a hundred innocent Jin disciples. You and your dead Wen-dog almost fatally injured my son and heir! We are here to stop your reign of terror, and to eliminate the remaining mutts of the Wens!”

Definitely Jin Guangshan, Wei Wuxian thought. He had missed a few words, but still thought he understood the general gist.

“Um,” he said. “Not to be that guy, but like, your nephew and those Jin disciples attacked me first at Qiongqi Path. They literally ambushed me.”

The faint sound of spluttering echoed over the water, as did the muttering of all those assembled.

“Also, like, why bring the remaining Wens into this? They literally have nothing to do with it.”

“The, the Ghost General was the weapon you yielded against us!”

“Okay, but he’s only one dude.”

“He’s Dead!”

“Yeah? And I was controlling him? It’s not like Wen Ning can be blamed for his actions, let alone his family?”

“The entirety of the Wen Sect must be destroyed for what they did during the war!”

“I think they’re good, actually,” Wei Wuxian said, coldly. “They have suffered enough for actions they had no part in doing.”

“They suffer enough, surely, as the puppets of Wei Wuxian, Yiling Patriarch, Lord of the Dead!”

Wei Wuxian blinked a few times. “Are you implying that I can tell them what to do? Because Charter, I wish I could tell them what to do, they never listen to me.”

“You admit to having no control! You must be eliminated, before your power grows too wild, destroying more and more innocent lives!”

“Hah. You’re welcome to try,” Wei Wuxian said in a voice knife thin and dangerous with contempt.

The arrow that struck him, clean through the tree he hid behind, through his back, to poke shyly from his stomach, arrow point coloured a delicate rose red, could not have been from Jin Guangshan. Wei Wuxian, gasping, struggling weakly to free himself from the tree the arrow had nailed him to, doubted it could be from any Jin disciple. If the Jin Sect had contained an archer good enough to rival Wei Wuxian, he would have known about it.

It was Charter spelled, of course, powerfully, the marks still crawling golden and lively along the arrow. Wei Wuxian felt them stir against the raw wound of his abdomen, a sickly sweet sort of movement inside a man almost consumed by Free Magic.

He vomited weakly onto his feet. Then, gathering Free Magic together like two bare hands reaching out and scooping flames from a forest-fire, he burned the arrow in his body to atoms, cauterising the wound at the same time. He pulled away from the tree, staggering only briefly.

Then he turned, and looked out across the water.

Blood-splattered lips pursed, he whistled a quick, jaunty tune. An arrow made of blue-white fire appeared before his eyes, and, when the tune ended with a sharp, piercing note, it turned. It pointed out across the water, quivering.

“Go fetch,” Wei Wuxian said viciously, and the arrow took flight. Trails of light lingered after its passage, faint and gleaming.

Wei Wuxian felt it in his gut when it hit its target. The target had not been Jin Guangshan, or any other leaders that may have been over there. The arrow was, simply, aimed at the one that had shot Wei Wuxian.

“How, how dare you!” came Jin Guangshan’s cry. “What a violent, cowardly attack!”

“How dare I? Were they not the daring one, the cowardly one, to attack me unprovoked?” Wei Wuxian said, then gave a breathy, discordant sort of laugh. “Not to speak ill of the dead.”

He did not hear a reply. Slumped against a different tree, he watched with hooded eyes as they began assembling together enough boats for the army to sail across all at once. To kill him, and to kill the last remnants of the Wen Sect. The only family he had left.

Diplomacy had never really been an option.

He pressed a hand absently against his stomach. His hand flinched away, and he blinked in confusion at the small burn on it. He looked down, and the injury in his stomach burned. The Free Magic had burnt his wound to charcoal. Flames still smouldered within him, flickering red on black, and he had not noticed.

“Wei Ying.”

His head jerked up at the low voice.

Free Magic boiled to his lips, but Wei Wuxian let it cool as he recognised the figure, all in white.

“Lan Zhan?” he half gasped. “How did you get here?”

“I took the boat,” he said. They both glanced to the river, to where the army was beginning to embark onto their own barges. “Your boat, on the other side,” Lan Wangji clarified.

“Ah,” Wei Wuxian said, and gave a helpless, hysterical grin. “The boat, of course, why didn’t all those other people who want to kill me think of that?”

“Wei Ying, I do not want to kill you,” Lan Wangji said.

“What, you’re here for the ambiance?” Wei Wuxian said, and gestured around. The presence of Death and Free Magic pressed down, almost physical in its weight. He looked at Lan Wangji and his eyes were bloodshot, his lips blood red. “Why are you here?”

“I am here to help you,” Lan Wangji said, quiet, serious. His eyes flicked down. “You are injured.” His hands beginning to sketch Charter marks for healing, he moved closer, moved to touch Wei Wuxian.

He dodged out of the way like he was dodging an attack. But he moved too quickly, letting out a gasp of pain as the move tore at his stomach.

“Wei Ying, please,” Lan Wangji said, eyes wide and stricken.

Wei Wuxian, back hunched as he curled over himself protectively, glanced up to meet Lan Wangji’s eyes. His mouth trembled before he let out a frantic burst of laughter.

“Oh, Lan Zhan,” he said, his voice and smile jarringly gentle on those blood-flecked lips. “Don’t throw your life away on me. Please. Lan Zhan, if there must be a fight between me and them, then I would rather fight to the death with you. If I must die, then at least I would die by the hands of you, Hanguang-jun. I would not be wronged.”

Lan Wangji looked at him. He and his brother were often known as the Twin Jades of Lan, for they were both pure of spirit, lovely of face. Lan Wangji’s face was considered even more jade-like, for it was so still and pale and expressionless it seemed as it truly had been carved from jade.

But his face, as he listened to Wei Wuxian, was not expressionless. Emotions crowded onto it until it was almost painful to look at, sunlight off snow.

He no longer even remotely resembled jade.

He looked, instead, very human.

But he only repeated, “I am here to help you, Wei Ying. Please, let me help you.”

The barges were within the range of ordinary archers now. Arrows began raining down around them, and Lan Wangji threw up a swift arrow ward. His sword curved in a great circle in the air in front of both of them. Glowing lines followed the sword’s path, until a shining circle, borne of the Charter, hung in the air.

Wei Wuxian looked at Lan Wangji's face, firm in concentration, and felt almost helpless. Then his own mouth firmed, and he brought out his flute.

Safe for now, behind Lan Wangji's ward, he started slow. But the Dead were still quick to respond, numerous and powerful and familiar with this border between Life and Death.

The barges docked, and the Dead were waiting for them.

Chapter End Notes

TW for severe injury, blood, burning, vomiting.

Remember when Wei Wuxian healed that stab wound from Jiang Cheng with no scar, no consequences, no price to pay? Ha.

Also, a [link](#) to an analysis of the speech Wei Wuxian gives Lan Wangji, it's brilliant and made me want to cry.

No pouring rain for this, but still, I think, just as dramatic.

silver flute, silver tongue

Chapter Notes

Trigger warnings in the end notes.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Most of the cultivators rapidly became too embroiled with keeping the Dead off to try and get to Wei Wuxian. But there were many who had come with a purpose. Some continued shooting, the arrows glancing off Lan Wangji's ward, while others hacked their way through the Dead with their swords.

Nie Mingjue was at the forefront, tall and proud and ferocious, his blade already gore stained. Wei Wuxian had fought alongside him a few times during the Sunshot campaign, and found him to be a formidable fighter. But it was not the sight of Wei Wuxian that had his face darkening.

"Wangji?" he called out, but Lan Wangji's concentration remained on his ward, absolute.

Wei Wuxian was puzzled, briefly, about why they would be on familiar terms, before remembering that Lan Xichen, the first Twin Jade, and Nie Mingjue were sworn brothers. He wondered then, with a sick feeling in his burning stomach, if Lan Wangji's brother and uncle were also there, among the cultivators he was sending the Dead to fight.

I can't keep letting him do this, he thought, with a flood of horror. *I can't be the one to stain him.*

The Dead were all around them now, wave upon wave of them using Wei Wuxian as a springboard into Life. Lan Wangji's ward created an island of Life in what was rapidly becoming an ocean of Dead.

Wei Wuxian thought, *I need to pull back*, but felt almost too sluggish to do it. The exhaustion of the fight, the seductiveness of his own song, the harmony of Death's response, all dragged him down. As if his mouth were a magnet and his flute metal, he could not force it from his lips. He was drowning in the music.

Lan Wangji grasped his forearm with one hand, hard.

"Wei Ying! You need to pull back!" he yelled, the strain of keeping the ward up visible on his face, the tendons in his arm standing out sharply against his skin.

And then Wei Wuxian heard it. "A-Xian!" called a woman's voice, and he flinched away from Lan Wangji's grip, his flute, still pouring out note after note, trembling in his hands.

In his few good dreams he heard that voice, but never like this, never surrounded by this sort of hell.

“Shijie?” he cried, and wrenched Chenqing from his lips. “What are you doing here? Where are you, I can’t see you, shijie, shijie!”

Lan Wangji, drops of sweat visible at his hairline, had also turned pale at Jiang Yanli’s voice. He looked almost panicked as he met Wei Wuxian’s eye. “I knew she was with Jiang Wanyin, they came in the same boat as I did, but he was meant to take her —”

Wei Wuxian did not wait for him to finish. He ran out from behind the ward, uncaring of the hundreds of people there to kill him, of the arrows and the swords and the Charter. He had to find his shijie.

He shoved through the Dead, and they turned to watch him, their stares blank at best, and, at worst, full of barely leashed hunger. They did not touch him, or Lan Wangji, who followed in his wake, but they watched him. Any cultivator that took the dissolved ward as an opportunity was set upon with ravenous glee.

And still, Wei Wuxian could not find Jiang Yanli. He was almost sobbing with frustration when he finally spotted her. She pushed through the hoards of Dead, Jiang Cheng chasing after her, desperately swinging Sandu at any that tried to attack.

But the Dead were hungry. They began to overwhelm the two even as Wei Wuxian saw them.

“Wei Wuxian!” Jiang Cheng roared over the groans of the Dead, even as Jiang Yanli cried out for him as well. “Make them stop!”

Wei Wuxian had been shoving bodily through the corpses, but jerked at the realisation. Panic made him clumsy, but still Chenqing was again brought to his lips. Lan Wangji gripped his arm again, and so Wei Wuxian played his lullaby.

It had to be powerful, to reach so many Dead, and so Wei Wuxian poured everything he had into it, all the Free Magic at his disposal, all his body, all his spirit.

He moved, one step at a time, closer to the Dead that surrounded his siblings, and the Dead, equally as slow, stepped away.

They formed a ring, and when Wei Wuxian pushed through it, he saw Jiang Cheng first. He knelt on the ground, and though covered in superficial wounds, did not seem overly injured. Then Wei Wuxian saw Jiang Yanli, cradled in his arms. Blood covered her from a vicious shoulder wound, and Jiang Cheng clutched her desperately, Charter marks for healing forming, bright and frantic, above her.

Wei Wuxian fell to his knees next to them, and grasped Jiang Yanli’s hand in his. Jiang Cheng looked at him, eyes red, his hands never ceasing their dance in the Charter. “You said you could control it,” he snarled “You said it’d be fine, you said you could control it, why didn’t you control it?”

“I’m sorry,” Wei Wuxian said, almost blankly. “I didn’t, I tried, I don’t know why it’s —”

Jiang Yanli’s eyes opened, though they remained glazed with pain. Jiang Cheng hurried to speak, voice thick with tears. “A-jie, a-jie, it’s fine, it’s fine, you’re going to be fine. How are you feeling? It’s not too bad, just a gash, I’ll bring you to a Charter healer, I’ll take you now.” He made to stand, gathering her more firmly in his arms.

“Take her to Wen Qing,” Wei Wuxian said. “She’s a brilliant healer, she’ll be able to —”

“A-Xian,” Jiang Yanli murmured, and Wei Wuxian looked down at her quickly.

“I’m here, shijie, I’m here.”

I’m so sorry, he didn’t say. Whatever she wanted to tell him was so much more important than any apology of his was worth.

“A-Xian,” she said, struggling to sit up straighter. Jiang Cheng supported her carefully, watching her with keen concern. “I wanted, I’m sorry, I wanted to help, I wanted to say, to tell you —”

She broke off with a shudder, and Wei Wuxian filled in the gaps. *Wanted to tell you that you’ve only ever caused me suffering, and trouble, that you almost made me a widow after only a year of marriage, that my reputation is forever stained by having you as a shidi.*

Around them, the fighting continued, Lan Wangji defending them, a one man army, his robes and sword still gleaming white.

But he was only one man, against hundreds of Dead, and hundreds of the Living. In the end, it was one of the Living that got past him.

Jiang Yanli’s eyes suddenly widened, and, with almost inhuman strength, she pushed Wei Wuxian to the side.

His shoulder slammed to the ground, and she collapsed on top of him. He turned, and caught her eye. At the same time, he caught sight of the sword in her neck, bright silver, dripping red. Her gaze held his for a moment, before her eyelids slipped close.

Amidst the Dead and the carnage and the Death surrounding them, Wei Wuxian still felt hers with the force of a tsunami.

He held her in his arms, and looked at Jiang Cheng, who looked back, disbelieving and shaking. The sword was pulled from her, and her blood sprayed out and soaked all three of them. Wei Wuxian did not look at her murderer. He did not have the time.

“Jiang Cheng,” he said, and, when Jiang Cheng just continued staring, screamed it. “Jiang Cheng! I need you to concentrate, keep healing her.”

He did not wait for him to nod, just turned and cried, “Lan Zhan!”

Lan Wangji turned to look at him, and even with the distance separating them, the horror was visible on his face.

“Lan Zhan, get them to Wen Qing! Get them to Wen Qing!”

Then he closed his eyes, and slipped into Death.

He arrived in Death still kneeling, and caught his shijie’s spirit as it began to float past. Gathering her back up into his arms, he held her spirit to him as closely as he did her body in Life.

The Dead he had summoned began to slowly surround him and he stood, struggling under the extra weight, though his shijie was small and slight.

She opened her eyes at the motion, and though nightmares encircled them, she did not look afraid.

“A-Xian,” she breathed, and smiled.

“Shijie,” he said, and let the tears he had been holding back slip free, to river down his face and drop, steaming, into the water below. “I’m so sorry shijie, I’m so sorry. This is all my fault, everything. Please forgive me, please, please. I’ll make this right.”

“A-Xian,” she began, and reached out a hand to his face, eyes gentle and sad. “It’s not your ___”

He pushed her out, back towards her body in Life, where he prayed Jiang Cheng had patched her wounds up as best as he could. Before the surrounding Dead spirits could follow her through the opening he had made, he lifted Chenqing to his lips, and set out to correct his mistakes. To end his folly, once and for all.

He strode through the precincts, a marching song he called *Kibeth* calling, calling, calling from his flute.

The Dead responded. More and more appeared around him, from behind, all being pulled none too gently from Life, like pus from an infected wound. Some raced ahead, caught and pulled inexorably down by the river. Others managed to stay upright, and so they marched beside Wei Wuxian, their master.

He arrived at the Second Gate, and as he stepped through, he started to run. He sprinted, his body half collapsing under him, the wave half a second from swallowing him whole. His fist clenched around his flute as he ran, and his stomach burned.

He passed through the Third Gate, the Free Magic searing through his whole body like a fever, and as he stepped into the Fourth Precinct, he wondered why.

Why he had run, when he could’ve let the water take him. Why he kept fighting, even though it hurt him. Why he let others fight for him when it only got them damaged, ruined. Shijie in his defence, that day so long ago against Jin Zixun, her husband later against his own cousin,

Lan Wangji, as he fought against his own brother, Jiang Cheng, his reputation forever stained by association with him.

The only thing that I cannot ruin is that which is already Dead, he realised, and closed his eyes in despair. Around him, Dead swirled past to the next gate, stunned from the Third Precinct.

He wanted suddenly, with all the ferocity of the pain from his wounded stomach, with the fire and acid of Free Magic eating him up from the inside, to join them. To kneel in the freezing water and let it heal him, to take him to the Ninth Precinct full of stars.

Then he thought of Wen Qing, and Wen Ning, and Wen Yuan, of their grandmother and their aunts and cousins and uncles.

“I cannot die,” he said, out loud, though the mists of Death still swallowed the words down to a muted softness. “I have wards to keep up. I have people to protect.”

Perhaps he could not die. But he could not go back, not without continuing to ruin the lives of those he loved. And he could not stay himself in Death, not without being corrupted beyond comprehension.

But he could, perhaps, stay here, if. If he were not himself.

So instead of going on, marching with the Dead to their final resting place, he finished his song, and forced them forward, to continue on, die a final Death, without him.

He did not watch them walk forward. Instead, he turned, and trudged sideways. The current pressed against the side of his legs, making a shushing sound as he moved, like a mother with her infant, like waves upon the shore. The waterfall of the Fourth Gate was his only companion, for there were no stars, no landmarks, no anything. Just the grey mists, the unending river, and the waterfall. He knew he could walk forever, and never reach his starting point.

In this strange, silver, infinite void was where he had constructed his own silver flute, Chenqing, when he first lost himself in Death.

Eventually he stopped, for no other reason than he could not make his trembling legs take another single step forward. He drew wards around himself, smaller versions of the ones he had sketched around his city in the Burial Mounds.

Then he drew on the silver mists, the silver river, and the silver waterfall, on the silvery burn of Free Magic in his veins. He planted himself firmly in the river, just on the dangerous, sly edge of the waterfall. And he let the silver overtake him.

TW for another traumatic injury resulting in death, and brief thoughts of suicide.

Jiang Yanli, I'm so sorry, I love you. Wei Wuxian, get therapy, I love you.

For the song mentioned, Kibeth, a brief description: Kibeth, or Walker, another bell that is not yet a bell. Kibeth is described as a difficult and contrary bell made up of several sounds, which can, under an experienced necromancer, make others go where the wielder wishes. It is a dangerous bell, however, as it has been known to ring of its own accord, and walk its user deeper into Death. The manifestation of this bell is a dog, the Disreputable Dog, hence why it's my favourite, and why Wei Wuxian should really not be a big fan of this one. Yet, here he is, playing its tune 🎵🎵

silver statue

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Nie Huaisang was not a woman people thought of as particularly clever. Throughout her life, she had mostly been known as a dreamy, ditzzy lover of fans, and all other pretty trinkets. She was also perhaps, the absolute opposite of a warrior.

Nie Mingjue had spent most of her childhood trying to mold her into a soldier worthy to be his brother. But once she transitioned, she insisted quite firmly that it wasn't ladylike to fight all the time, and he was forced, with much grumbling, to give up the pursuit.

When she was a child, she had had less of a filter, and had often said strange things, with even stranger moments of wisdom and foresight. But as an adult, she seemed less certain - she loathed making decisions, almost as much as she hated getting involved in Sect politics.

Her sect were therefore quite disconcerted when her brother died, and left her as their leader.

To their surprise and relief, the sect was not immediately brought to ruin, but there were quite a few changes made. Over time, the sect faded from their status as the warrior sect.

But some considered this almost a good thing; it created a strange time of peace for the Nie Sect.

Nie Huaisang was a mildly embarrassing representative to have, and was truly terrible at making decisions. She, in fact, became known as the Head Shaker. And so, the quiet prosperity and peace of her leadership went mostly uncommented on. Surely, most people said, it was all entirely a fluke.

Perhaps half a decade after the death of her brother, as she found herself sneaking into the Jiang Sect's Hall of Ancestors, she thought, with some amusement, on the absurdity of her situation. She was used to making herself out to be ridiculous for her sect's benefit, but this really took the cake. And, she thought to herself, just because she was used to it didn't mean she couldn't complain about it.

"Honestly, this whole cloak and dagger thing is really quite undignified for someone of my status," she said to the boy by her side, sniffing a little to get the point across. Mo Xuanyu shot her a look, which expertly seemed to convey exactly what he was thinking, which was a combination of, *This was your idea in the first place*, and, *As if you care about dignity*.

Mo Xuanyu is far too good at that, Nie Huansang mused. *Comes of being trans, of course. We're all really too talented.*

There honestly wasn't much need to be stealthy. They were both staying as guests at Lotus Pier, though Mo Xuanyu was really more of a guest of guest, as he'd traveled there with Nie Huaisang. The rumours this caused were, in her opinion, hysterical, especially considering the gossip already circulating around Mo Xuanyu. But, it was how it had to be. How she had seen it happening.

In any case, if it had been daylight, either of them would have been let into the hall, no questions asked.

However, it was not daylight. And the things they wanted to do there would almost definitely not have been approved of.

The lanterns were no longer lit, and the hall was in shadow. With a casual flick of her hand, a pale gold light formed and bobbed in the air, flickering slightly and glinting gold off the shrines.

The Charter Stone that the ancestors' shrines all curved around gleamed in response, the endless stream of Charter marks that made it and covered it looping faster in response.

The only thing that didn't welcome the Charter borne light was the strange silver statue that knelt in the corner of the hall.

It was this statue that the two of them, odd pair that they were, had come for.

As they approached it, both of them felt shivers run down their spine. They had both seen it, in the daytime, when the lanterns and trickles of sunlight had glinted prettily off the silver, making it shine and glitter.

But in the night, with the Charter light only barely touching it before glancing off, it had a very different aura.

It was perhaps inaccurate to say it was a kneeling statue. It was on its knees, yes, but not in a neat way. It sprawled, like it had collapsed under an awful weight. Grief, perhaps, judging by terrible sorrow on the statue's face, that twisted it almost beyond recognition with its force.

Nie Huaisang, however, did recognise him. She had not been there for his death, or even, perhaps, most of his life. But she had still, for a time, considered him a friend.

She attempted to examine him dispassionately, however. She may have once been friends with him, but that had been many years ago. She was doing what she did now for one reason, and it had very little to do with the statue that had once laughed with her, teased her, treated her like...

But still, she could not long stare at the naked grief of his face, at eyes which looked down into empty arms that had clearly once held something, without her own eyes flinching away.

She looked over at Mo Xuanyu, who was looking at her with a raised eyebrow.

"What?" she asked, raising her own back.

He shrugged. “Never seen you look that honest,” he said casually. He turned his gaze to the statue and raised his arm as if to touch the sharp cut of its cheekbone. The cheekbone glimmered ever so slightly brighter than the rest of it.

“You think the girl sect disciples dare each other to come in here and make-out with him?” he pondered. “Or do you think they would all be too freaked out by his expression, and you know, him being the Yiling Patriarch, to care how pretty he is?”

“I think,” Nie Huaisang replied, resolutely not thinking of how many years she had wasted caring how pretty Wei Wuxian had been, “that the night is not a resource we can continue wasting indefinitely.”

“Yeah, yeah,” he muttered, and fumbled at his belt, where several leather pouches were attached. From two of them he brought out two different bells. They were made of the same strange silver of the statue, and gleamed dully, refusing to reflect the golden Charter light.

He held them tightly, not by the handles, but by the clappers on their insides, ensuring they would not ring accidentally.

“Maybe put one of them away,” Nie Huaisang advised. “So one hand is free for a weapon.”

“I know what I’m doing,” he said irritably. Nonetheless, he put the one he called Mosrael back into its leather pouch, and drew his sword.

“Actually, are you sure you want to be walking around with your sword drawn, it might —” Mo Xuanyu gave her a glare, and she threw her hands up in a pacifying gesture.

“Alright, alright, you know what you’re doing.”

“I’ve been in Death before,” he said stiffly. “I’ve read *his* notes. I know more about this than you.”

“Of course, of course! Why else would I have hired you?” Nie Huaisang said with a smile.

The reasons for his hiring, however, were a great deal more complicated than that.

Mo Xuanyu took a deep breath. Nie Huaisang watched him with keen eyes. “There’s no shame in backing out, you know. It’s understandable if you’re scared.”

He shot her a poisonous look. Using his sword, somewhat awkwardly, he carved a great slice into his hand. He sheathed it again clumsily, though kept an inch or two free, to make it easy to draw again. Then he reached out to clasp his bloody hand round the statue’s forearm, and let Free Magic bubble from his mouth like venom from a snake. His body stiffened, then froze completely.

Nie Huaisang, watching ice crystals creep up his chest to twine tenderly around his neck, bit her lip and turned to go. There was nothing she could do to help from Life, and there were other parts of her plan to enact. For Mo Xuanyu, she could only hope that her last words to the strange teenage boy would not be that cruel, deliberate goad.

Mo Xuanyu's arrival into Death was preceded with a great struggle. When a place housed a whole and healthy Charter Stone and was covered in Charter marks for keeping the Dead down and appeased, the door to Death was firmly locked, and felt distinctly distant.

And if one was young and healthy, like Mo Xuanyu, the key could only be a great deal of power, sacrifice, and blood.

Mo Xuanyu was not particularly powerful, and, depressed as he was, didn't particularly want to kill himself.

But he was a Charter mage, and he had the blood. He was clever, he was angry, and he had read the notes of the Yiling Patriarch. It would have to be enough.

It was, though just barely. He squeezed into Death like a fly through a microscopically cracked window, and stood in the icy water for a moment, panting like he'd already started drowning.

He wrapped his injured hand clumsily in some cloth he had brought especially for that purpose. He did not want his Living blood to run down freely into the river below, and give the hungry Dead from further in reason to fight against the current.

He reached the First Gate swifter than he ever had. He thought that his body's position, inside all the wards of Jiang Sect's Ancestral Hall, probably had something to do with the lack of Dead.

He said the words of the Free Magic spell, and winced as it burned all the way up his throat.

He had put on a brave face for Nie Huaisang, but Free Magic was always a vicious tool to use, and did not often appreciate being used at all. It was raw power, not governed and contained as the Charter was.

The series of waterfalls were revealed, and as he spoke and gestured left and right, a path appeared through them. He walked carefully down it.

The light was worse in the Second Precinct, the mist dark grey and as heavy as a soaked woollen blanket around him. The river roared as the current increased, pulling and pulling at his legs, tugging him towards all the deepest sinkholes.

He hobbled through the precinct gingerly, using his sword like a cane to test each footfall. If he had not been moving so slowly, perhaps he would have tripped on the Dead creature that came careening into his legs from the force of river. It had been caught in the current, but the collision seemed to have shocked it as much as it did Mo Xuanyu. Its filmy eyes opened, and it reached its arms down and clawed itself to a stop along the riverbed.

On all fours, it threw its head up, and looked at Mo Xuanyu with filmy white eyes. It was not a recent Dead, he realised, as it opened its maw to reveal rotten, jagged teeth. It had probably worked its way into Life after some time in Death, and been forced back by a cultivator.

Well, he thought, somewhat hysterically. I'm a cultivator too, or I would have been. Let's send this beast on again.

He drew his Charter spelled sword, and the thing hissed. It threw itself at him. He parried, slicing into its arm, and it let out a horrible screech, touching down behind him. He turned quickly, but not quickly enough. It launched itself up again, landing on his back and reaching long, sharp nails around his neck.

He gave a sharp whistle, and it shivered, and stilled for just a second. But it was enough time for him to shake it off, and bring his sword down hard upon it with a two handed grip. It gave a thin cry, and, as he pulled the sword back out of its pulpy flesh with a *squelch*, twitched weakly. Then the water caught it, and the river carried it swiftly out of sight.

He looked around very carefully before beginning to move forward again, his grip around his sword hard and shaking.

Chapter End Notes

NHS and MXY never interact on-screen, and that baffles me, because not only do they actually conspire together in canon, but like, can you imagine two people with more potential to be absolutely wild together? There's a solid 20 years between them? How did they meet? How did NHS even come up with their absolutely insane plan to get revenge in the first place?

Well, I've answered the last question, at least 😊

So, the two bells mentioned here! Mosrael is the only one named, and is also known as Waker. The bell's sound is harsh and rowdy, and in canon acts as a seesaw, throwing the ringer further into Death, while bringing the listener closer to Life. None of the bells are exactly safe, but Mosrael is definitely one of the more dangerous ones. Let's hope Mo Xuanyu knows what he's doing...

call for help and he'll answer

He stopped well back from the Second Gate, the whirlpool silently raging in front of him. He opened his mouth to say the Free Magic spell, and almost cried as it came out, wild and agonising.

The whirlpool slowed to stop. It left a long spiral, like a seashell, for him to edge his way down. He sheathed his sword, and took a deep breath before entering the Third Precinct. Then he ran, pelting forward, Death on his heels.

But he was healthy and young, and had had a five hour nap that day. He reached the mists of the Third Gate, yelping out the spell as he went, and the wave crashed harmlessly past as he entered the Fourth Precinct.

As he stood there for a second to catch his breath, hands shaking against his knees, he felt his awareness of the Yiling Patriarch suddenly increase sharply. He was touching his statue in real life, touching it with his blood gloved hand, and that meant something, in here.

He heaved in one last deep breath, and stood straight. He marched forward. But he reached the Fourth Gate with no increase in the man's presence. Mo Xuanyu stopped well back from the gate, and frowned.

He did not want to enter the deadly Fifth Precinct, but he also hadn't thought he needed to. The Yiling Patriarch's presence was so strong, as was sharp scent of Free Magic wards.

He glanced behind him, completely baffled. There was no way he would've missed him if he'd been on the way.

Then he glanced left. "Oh, that's clever," he commented out loud, then looked right. "Charter, he was a tricky guy. I really hope this isn't a trap."

He turned left, and walked along the waterfall. He walked for what seemed like forever, though he almost didn't notice the time passing, drifting into a kind of fugue state, lulled by the silver fog and rushing water.

He was so caught up in the hazy mist that he nearly missed it.

"Oh, shit," he whisper-shrieked, as he almost burned himself to a crisp on the wards. He jerked himself back a few steps, and watched in awe as they buzzed resentfully a few feet from his face.

"Well, those are impressive," he said weakly. They would obviously have had to have been strong, considering how long he had been in there, enclosed in his crackling cage.

Through the angry red light of the wards, he could just make out the silver of the Yiling Patriarch. He was a little surprised to find him standing, not kneeling as he was in Life. His tarnished silver flute, Chenqing, Mo Xuanyu named with a shudder, was against his lips. But

the same look of fierce concentration and grief was on his face, the same surrender written on his closed eyelids.

“Right,” Mo Xuanyu said decisively. “You’ve been like this for long enough. It’s time to get you out of there.” *If this will even work through your scaryass wards*, he didn’t say out loud.

He had never let go of the bell he called Kibeth, or rather, the clapper on the inside of it.

“Charter, I hope this works, or I’m Dead for sure,” he whispered. As slowly as possible, he transferred his grip to the bell’s handle.

Kibeth trembled excitedly in his grip and swayed slightly of its own volition. But he held it carefully motionless, and it eventually settled.

Then he opened the second pouch. He warily surveyed the water around him for any sign of a Dead creature before he dared even touch Mosrael.

It was not a heavy bell, the smallest of them apart from Ranna, but he pulled it out, nonetheless, with excruciating care.

He let out a shuddering breath. “Please, please, please, work, please wake, please work,” he chanted, then took another breath, smoother than the last. He waited until his breaths came evenly, wave after wave on a sunlit beach, emptying his mind like he did when he meditated.

Then he swung the bells. Mosrael he swung in a three-quarter circle above his head, and Kibeth in a reverse figure-of-eight. Neither of them sounded particularly lovely on their own, and together, even less so. Mosrael called out in a harsh alarm, while Kibeth played a marching, dancing rhythm. It made for a grating, discordant, but energetic tone.

He felt his feet moving towards the waterfall against his own will, moving to the beat he had set, and his eyes almost opened in his panic. But he forced his mind blank again.

His feet continued moving. But he knew that even if he tried to stop the ringing of the bells, their influence would continue. He needed to finish the song.

He could feel the cool spray of the waterfall on his neck, feel the harsh tugging of the water around his feet, and almost gave in to it, his legs buckling. Then a strong hand clenched around his forearms and he was forced to stop, the bells stilling to a ringing silence under that hard, unyielding grip.

His eyes popped open. The statue’s silver eyes did not. In fact, it looked exactly the same as it had before, only now it gripped Mo Xuanyu’s forearm in a crushing hold.

“Um,” Mo Xuanyu said, a little breathless. “Thanks.”

It did not move.

“Could you, um, possibly, hold me a little less tightly? I promise to put the bells away.”

It seemed to ignore him, and turned suddenly, walking away from the waterfall, tugging him along with it.

But perhaps it had not. For when they were well back from the gate, it stopped, just as suddenly, and let its grip loosen.

“Thanks,” Mo Xuanyu said again, and returned the bells to their pouches. “Now I just need to figure out how to, uh, unsilver you.”

He looked at the statue, and the statue did not look back. It did, however, tighten its hand once more, and resumed hauling him through the Fourth Precinct, to the Third Gate.

As they reached the mists Mo Xuanyu opened his mouth to say the spells, but a flare of Free Magic next to him made him look sharply at the statue. A very faint melody, like the distant sound of the flute, came from Chenqing, still placed delicately against the statue’s lips.

The statue did not look back at him, but set its feet on the path that appeared before them, steps firm and deliberate.

They ran through the Third Precinct, and Mo Xuanyu, despite the loud pounding of his heart, despite the desperation of his panting, felt the strong metal fingers tighten around his wrist, and was comforted. The whirlpool loomed, but it froze before his eyes, icy staircase coiling upward, and the statue tugged him easily forward.

Despite Mo Xuanyu’s heaving chest, the statue barely slowed through the Second Precinct, navigating with complete confidence through the potholes and the dark, heavy fog.

It belatedly occurred to Mo Xuanyu that this silver statue of the Yiling Patriarch, years spent deep in Death, could be entirely corrupted, and could be using his spark of Life as a way of launching itself out of Death.

But by the way the very air around it seemed to boil with Free Magic, Mo Xuanyu doubted whether it even need the extra power.

It was still not a pleasant thought.

Through the First Gate, through the precinct, with unwavering determination. But it paused, just briefly, on the edge of Life.

Mo Xuanyu knew that the border was thick here, thick like a barred and locked steel door. But he wondered if it would even matter to one as powerful as the Yiling Patriarch.

The statue bowed its head, then released his arm, and, slower than before, turned back the way it had come.

“Wait!” Mo Xuanyu cried, and grabbed the statue’s arm. It let him pull it to a stop, though it was clearly strong enough to tug free. Mo Xuanyu struggled to find the words, not sure why it had turned back. Had it just been escorting him back to the border?

“I, I need help,” he said. “I need you to help me back into Life, and to do that, you need to come with me.”

It made no move to indicate it had understood, still turned away from Life, as still as if it had really never been anything else but dead silver.

But then it turned, and clasped his forearm once again. With all the massive force of a glacier carving its way down a mountain, it tore through into Life, and dragged Mo Xuanyu along with it.

He opened his eyes, frost falling from his eyelashes in tiny, snowy particles, to sunlight, and a very different scene than the one he had left.

“Oh, shit,” he rasped around his abused throat, and promptly passed out.

Jiang Cheng peered down at him severely. “Oh, for fuck’s sake. He only just got back.”

He rolled his eyes, and ordered his disciples to pick the kid up and take him to the infirmary. In a minute, he would go wake Nie Huaisang, and have *words* with her over her choice of guests. But before he did that, he paused, and studied the statue of his brother. It did not move. He snorted bitterly at himself for daring to hope that it would, and swept from the room in a swirl of purple robes.

But still, throughout the day, as he interrogated a perfectly confused Nie Huaisang, as he asked his disciples, over and over, for reports on Mo Xuanyu’s condition, as he did all the work necessary to keep his sect running, his thoughts were never far from the silver statue, kneeling in the corner of his Ancestral Hall.

every year that passes

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Lan Wangji loved his disciples, he really did. But he had sent them out to do a routine cleansing of a nearby sect, and what should have been a simple mission turned into an absolute catastrophe.

They had managed to attract a truly vicious Dead creature. It had possessed several of the residents, sucking the Life from them as it abandoned its hosts, and had managed to injure every single one of his disciples, though thankfully, none fatally. He had arrived before it came to that, at least. It was a powerful spirit, but he had subdued and contained it. He did not send it back to Death immediately, however. He would be able to do that more easily and permanently once back in the Cloud Recesses.

Before then, however, he needed to get treatment for his disciples. He was a powerful Charter Mage, but he was not specialised in healing magic. They needed a Charter healer. All major sects had at least one, and the closest sect was —

“Lotus Pier!” Lan Jingyi cheered, and Lan Sizhui gave a wide smile that showed off his dimples.

“Oh, I hope Jiang-furen is visiting, she makes the most amazing soup,” he said brightly.

“Yeah, but she’s constantly surrounded by all her kids, and Jin Ling always tries to fight me for some reason,” Lan Jingyi said, looking puzzled, before brightening as their food arrived.

Lan Sizhui smiled gently. “I can think of plenty of reasons,” he said, patting him pityingly on the shoulder.

Lan Jingyi nodded, before he processed what had been said. “Hey!” he said, and was about to begin shouting, and probably put Lan Sizhui in a headlock, when Lan Wangji intervened.

“Speech is forbidden while dining,” he said gravely, and, with a valiant effort, did not rub at his temples where a headache was forming. The two dedicated themselves to their meal, and if there was quite a lot of elbowing and foot squashing going on, Lan Wangji was not particularly inclined to mention it.

Lotus Pier. He tried to think of the prospect of interacting with Jiang Wanyin, a man who he had always gotten along with solely because they never talked about anything but business. Whether Jiang Wanyin counted as a man of few words or not, he and Lan Wangji shared a mutual distaste for small talk.

However, Jiang Wanyin could never hold his attention for long. His thoughts skimmed right past, like a smooth rock across a still lake, to sink comfortably into thoughts of Wei Wuxian.

It had been thirteen years since he last saw him alive, and he had visited the Jiang Ancestral Hall many times since.

But each time he returned, to see the unchanging statue, face caught still in the throes of agony and grief, the pain tore into him like a physical thing. Every time, he thought himself at least partially steeled against him, and every visit, he found he was wrong.

His stomach churned, dread and anticipation a familiar and uncomfortable mixture.

He went to bed promptly at nine that night, as he always had, but it could not be said that he slept well.

They traveled slowly, mindful of their injured, and so arrived late the next day. It was later than the curfew of the Cloud Recesses, and Lan Wangji thought of his first time meeting Wei Wuxian.

But Lotus Pier was not his home - they agreed to host Hanguang-jun and his disciples with an easy swiftness. Jiang Wanyin met with him briefly, looking annoyed, as was his custom, mildly suspicious, which wasn't unusual, and harried.

Despite the fact that he had sent word ahead of their stay, Lan Wangji would've felt an uncomfortable awareness of the rudeness of the late notice, if most of those suspicious looks hadn't been directed towards him.

He waited outside of the infirmary as his disciples were checked for lingering Free Magic spells, and the injured given additional healing.

His face remained impassive, but the tension held in his shoulders released, bit by bit, as each of his students came out, fine, or on their way to being there.

Lan Sizhui and Lan Jingyi were the last to leave, exiting together and chatting amiably.

"...wonder why that Jin guy was in there, he looked really pale."

"What makes you think he's a Jin?"

"Looks like one. Do you think he's one of Jiang-furen's kids?"

"No, I've met all of them. Besides, Jin Ling is the eldest, and the boy in there looked our age, or older."

They had already started walking back to their rooms. Lan Sizhui, however, seemed to realise that Lan Wangji wasn't walking with them - he glanced back at him with a quizzical expression.

Lan Wangji just nodded at him to keep going, and after a pause, and a curious head tilt, he did.

Once they turned the corner, Lan Wangji started in the other direction, steps as slow and as dignified as they always were.

If he had been the sort of person to run, would he be running forward, or running back?

Metaphorically back, physically forward, he thought with a combination of amusement and bitterness, then stepped through the doorway of the Jiang Ancestral Hall.

It smelled, as all these types of places do, of incense and Charter Magic and stone. Lan Wangji took a sudden deep breath in, however, as he caught the sharp tang of Free Magic.

He was instantly on guard, his hand hovering over his sword.

But nothing jumped out at him, nothing even moved. All was quiet, and still, in the dim light of the smouldering sticks of incense.

His gaze was drawn down like gravity to the corner, where a silver statue knelt. His feet followed his gaze, though he kept his senses keen for any disturbances.

And then he was in front of him. Wei Wuxian did not look back, just stared down into his empty arms, anguish etched into every line of his face.

Lan Wangji had never been good at talking to Wei Wuxian, had never had the right words. His mouth never quite managed to sync with his thoughts. That hadn't changed, even with one of them gone. But that, of course, did not mean he did not think at all.

Will your expression always burn to look at? Charter, will you ever stop having every sort of effect on me, even in Death? Especially in Death.

He looked away. Then looked back again quickly, frowning slightly. He reached out, and touched one of Wei Wuxian's arms. There, on the tarnished silver of his sleeve, was a streak of rust brown.

Blood.

And, he thought grimly as he touched it, the source of the lingering edge of Free Magic.

He looked up quickly, but Wei Wuxian's face remained unmoving. Lan Wangji remained still too, examining him carefully.

After a long moment, he sighed. He reached a hand up, and fit it gently to the knife thin jut of his cheekbone.

It never stops breaking my heart how thin you were, he thought, feeling his face twist as if to copy Wei Wuxian's expression. *No matter how many times I see you like this. No matter how many years you stay... Oh, my love, my love, you look younger and younger with every year that passes.*

He pressed his forehead against Wei Wuxian's. He felt the ridges of the wild wisps of his silver hair, felt his own baptismal Charter mark flare, as if calling out for a answering flash. But the Charter was silent.

A tear trickled down, to splash against the unyielding collar of Wei Wuxian's robes.

Lan Wangji pulled away, and inhaled a shivering breath before he leaned back in. He kissed him, soft and tender on the forehead, just above the faint outline of his Charter mark.

Then he turned around and walked towards the door. His mind moved with an effort to contemplate the serious conversation he was about to have with Jiang Wanyin, about the disturbing implications of the blood.

A faint whistle stopped him in his tracks. He froze.

Hand hovering over his sword, heartbeat like a drum against his skull, he turned. Wei Wuxian's lips were pursed, and from them came the whistle.

Lan Wangji's breath shuddered out, and Wei Wuxian's shuddered in. His lips turned from silver to pink, and it spread, silver to gold, across his cheeks, to the deep brown of his eyes, to the black of his lashes, his eyebrows. They smoothed out from their agonised expression, and he blinked his open eyes closed. On to his forehead and neck, silver to gold, then black again for his hair, for his robes, until his chest turned from hard metal to flexible skin, lungs heaving it out with one huge, convulsive breath.

Lan Wangji did not know when he had joined Wei Wuxian on his knees. But he was there to catch him as he started to tip over. His skin was cold, but the cold of a human, not of metal. Wei Wuxian shivered as his face pressed against Lan Wangji's neck, and he leaned in closer.

His legs and arms turned from silver to flesh, and he collapsed completely against Lan Wangji. He gathered him up, all of him, cradling him against his chest, and Wei Wuxian made no protest, his silver tipped fingernails fading to white as he curled them up closer to Lan Wangji's warmth.

Soon, the only silver left on his body was the flute, slotted through his belt.

Lan Wangji was barely breathing. He was sure that this was somehow a dream. Wei Wuxian was too cold and light, as if the slightest pressure would have him melt like a snowflake through his fingers.

But Wei Wuxian breathed against him, and his eyelashes fluttered restlessly against his throat, fingers twitching fitfully against his chest, and he almost didn't care. It felt so real.

He did not, however, appear to be conscious. Lan Wangji waited, but though Wei Wuxian continued to exist, to breathe, to fidget, he didn't seem inclined to wake.

Lan Wangji rose to his feet, Wei Wuxian held closely in his arms. He needed to be treated by a healer. But before that, Lan Wangji would have to majorly revise the speech he had been preparing for Jiang Wanyin.

Oh, Lan Wangji, I've missed you ♥♥♥

In case it wasn't very clear, the mission the disciples were sent on in the beginning of the chapter was the one at Mo Village, at the beginning of The Untamed.

Also, if this seems very cliché/inspired by Sleeping Beauty, take that up with Garth Nix! This chapter is pretty much exactly how it happened in Sabriel, when she resurrects Touchstone (okay, it's pretty different actually, but the basic premise is the same). The "breath of Life" is what actually woke Wei Wuxian, Lan Wangji just happened to be kissing him and breathing on him at the same time 😊

And now that I've sufficiently spoiled most of the series for you... I would definitely recommend the Old Kingdom book series, if you've never read it before 📖

healing

Chapter Notes

Ref. for Chinese [terms](#).

Is anyone else thinking about how in the book, Lan Wangji was actually super buff? Because I think about that... three times a day. Anyway, you *should* consider this when you start questioning how long someone can carry a grown man in their arms bridal style.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

Lotus Pier was not deserted after nine like the Cloud Recesses were, but Lan Wangji still made it to Jiang Wanyin's rooms unnoticed. The simple Charter spell he had created for just such a purpose dissolved as he stepped into them.

Jiang Wanyin shrieked, and dived for his sword. Lan Wangji didn't do anything to stop him, because his arms were full, and it was also pretty amusing.

He came up brandishing Sandu, and blinked a little when he took in the unmoving Lan Wangji.

"Uh, Hanguang-jun," he said, baffled and annoyed. "What are you —"

He cut off, and went pale when he noticed Wei Wuxian.

"Is that —?" he said hoarsely, before breaking off completely.

"He just. Stopped being made of silver," Lan Wangji said, equally at a loss, but less willing to show it.

Jiang Wanyin looked suddenly, surprisingly vulnerable. "He's breathing?"

"Yes," Lan Wangji said, though he quickly glanced down again to check. Wei Wuxian's face was soft against his chest, and his breaths came in deep, uneven puffs.

Jiang Wanyin came closer, and hovered a hand over his face uncertainly. "He looks... alive, but not particularly well. Does he need a healer?"

"Mn. Came to get you, first."

Jiang Wanyin jerked his head up, squinted at his face suspiciously, then huffed out a breath. "Thanks. Let's get him to the healer, then."

He gestured for Lan Wangji to go first before falling into step, his eyes barely leaving his brother's face.

Together, though they swept through Lotus Pier like a pair of particularly dramatic birds, they managed not to attract any attention, and knocked on the healer's rooms.

"Do you have *any* idea how late it is, or how many people I've already healed today," called an irritated voice from inside. The sound of someone stomping to the door followed after a prolonged groan.

She threw the screen open, and glared, first at Jiang Wanyin, then at Lan Wangji, then at Wei Wuxian. But she did a double take when she got a proper look at him, and looked sharply back at Jiang Wanyin.

"I apologise for disturbing you at this late hour," Jiang Wanyin said when she looked at him again, and bowed. "But my brother spontaneously decided to come back to Life, so. It's not my fault."

She looked at him severely. "Does his heart beat? Does he have an uncorrupted Charter mark? Or is he some kind of creature? I don't want to have a shock when I get a closer look at him, not this late at night, at my age."

Lan Wangji could feel his chest rise and fall against his own, but just to be certain, he collected Wei Wuxian's wrist and set two fingers lightly against his pulse. It beat, strong and unsteady under his fingertips.

"It beats," he said, his tone final, but his thoughts full of wonder.

"And his Charter mark?"

The faded mark on his forehead glimmered. Lan Wangji reached out the same two fingers he had placed on Wei Wuxian's pulse, and set them against his mark.

It flared a dazzling, hot silver. His eyes screwed shut against the brightness. Jiang Wanyin swore. But the light died again, just as quickly. When he opened his eyes again, blinking away spots from his vision, the mark was gone from Wei Wuxian's forehead.

Instead, it was as clear as a newborn's. Or a dead man's.

Yet his chest still rose and fell.

"Well," said the healer. "That was weird."

The two men looked at her. "Guess you'd better bring him inside," she continued. She stepped aside to let Jiang Wanyin through, but reached out a curious hand and set it on Wei Wuxian's forehead.

She humphed, and let them pass.

The infirmary was dim, with several cots set up in neat rows along the wall. Only one was occupied; a young man covered in several blankets.

Jiang Wanyin followed Lan Wangji's gaze. "Mo Xuanyu. Came as a guest with Nie Huaisang, and was found yesterday morning in front of - the statue, frozen in Death. He came back on his own, which I wasn't expecting him to be able to do, we've got a lot of wards up. But he passed out straight away, hadn't woken up since."

"You did not check on Wei Wuxian afterwards?"

"Of course we fucking checked on the frozen form of my brother, trapped in Death, who this guy was clearly trying to resurrect," Jiang Wanyin snapped. "But he didn't fucking do anything, just kept being all... silver."

He looked away, and muttered, "Until you fucking turned up, of course."

"Lay him down, lay him down," the healer said impatiently, and Lan Wangji, a little reluctantly, began to lower him.

Wei Wuxian did not protest until he pulled his arms carefully out from under him. But he cried out, suddenly, when all contact ceased, and grabbed for Lan Wangji's retreating arm.

They all froze a little in surprise.

"If he's anything like the other one," the healer said, peering down at the still sleeping Wei Wuxian. "He's probably a little chilly. You!" she said, pointing at Jiang Wanyin.

"Me?"

"Go get some blankets from the chest over there."

He went, muttering darkly about being a prominent sect leader.

"Now," she said, rubbing her hands, and a flash of Charter Magic flared from her gnarled hands. "Let's see what we've got."

Wei Wuxian was shivering, and Lan Wangji knelt properly so he could keep a hold of his hand without bending.

The healer didn't seem to have to same qualms - she was bent nearly in half, her hands gliding half an inch from Wei Wuxian's skin, Charter marks looping, endless and golden, around her fingers.

She was frowning as she did it, and muttering.

"Why do you look like that?" Jiang Wanyin demanded as he came back and dumped his load of blankets on the cot next to Wei Wuxian. "What's wrong with him?"

"Well, that's quite obvious. He just came back from who knows how long in Death, —"

“Thirteen years,” Jiang Wanyin and Lan Wangji said simultaneously.

“—his Charter mark just disappeared, he’s frozen solid, still unconscious, practically oozing Free Magic, and,” she said, starting to peel back the top of his robes, “I think he’s injured.”

“How?” they both demanded, but fell silent as they saw his stomach.

“What is that, a burn, an arrow wound?” Jiang Wanyin asked.

The healer peered down closely, then poked it. Wei Wuxian let out a small groan.

“Arrow wound,” she said briskly. “He probably tried to heal it with Free Magic, and that never goes well if you’re tired or in a hurry.”

“You will be able to heal him, though,” Lan Wangji said, intense and not quite a question.

“Who knows?” she said. “Now both of you shut up, I need to concentrate.”

They did, though as the night wore on, and her Charter magic started to flicker in and out, both of them would silently reach over, picturing the marks for Healing firmly in their minds, lending her their magic and strength.

It was close to dawn when she finally stepped back, complexion grey and hands trembling slightly. “That’s as far as I’m going to get tonight,” she said with finality.

“I will have some people bring you food,” Jiang Wanyin said.

She nodded wearily. “You,” she said to Lan Wangji, and he looked up. “Keep an eye on him.”

He just nodded. He had not been planning on doing anything else.

Jiang Wanyin left in search of food, and to send a message to his sister and Wen Qing. In his words, “They will literally murder me if I wait any longer to tell them.”

Lan Wangji wondered suddenly what Lan Sizhui would think of this. He knew that the boy had seen the statue once before, and that it had taken a whole day afterwards for him to stop crying. But that had been more than a decade ago - would he even still remember?

Lan Wangji was also brought food, and he went to the door to collect it, sending word at the same time to his disciples of his absence, though not of the reason. He hastened back to Wei Wuxian, for Lan Wangji’s absence had caused his shivering to increase dramatically.

For the rest of the day, Lan Wangji stayed by Wei Wuxian’s side. He did not sleep, but settled to be more comfortable, leaning against him and keeping a hold of Wei Wuxian’s hand, as the contact helped ease his trembling.

He had been meditating for several hours before something changed. It was not a change in Wei Wuxian’s condition, however, but in Mo Xuanyu’s. He began tossing and turning, crying out faintly and plaintively.

The healer, looking a little worse for wear, shuffled into the room. “Never rains but it pours,” she muttered, and began a diagnostic on the boy.

He shifted restlessly under her magic, before sitting up abruptly, gasping. “Easy now,” she said, a steadying hand on his shoulder.

He continued panting, looking around wildly. Too much white surrounded his irises, and he was clearly taking nothing in. “Easy,” she said again, softer. “You’re here, you’re alive, you’re safe.”

He looked up at her, eyes focusing for the first time. “In Life?” he gasped out, voice rasping and sharp like a rusted sword.

“In Life,” she confirmed.

He slumped back against his blankets. “Life,” he repeated softly, and his gaze drifted around the room like he was about to fall back asleep. But they flew wide again when he noticed the other occupied cot in the room.

“He’s back?” he croaked, awe shining clean and bright from his dark eyes.

“Yes,” she said shortly. “And I don’t know what sort of evil you’ve unleashed back into the world, but I do know that it has created more work for me. So I would stay. Still. And rest, or I will make you regret it.”

He looked appropriately cowed, and she nodded briskly, and continued her examination, before fetching some water and soup. He made a decent dent in both while she observed with eagle eyes. “Well, nothing major seems to be wrong with you. You’re still cold, I take it?”

He nodded. “Hmph,” she said, and got him another blanket. “Your Charter mark is there and uncorrupted,” she continued, “and your use of Free Magic may have taken a toll on you, but you should recover within the week. As long,” and she peered down at him severely, “as you rest.”

He nodded, eyes already starting to droop. “Why would my Charter mark not be there?” he asked sleepily.

The healer exchanged a look with Lan Wangji, and rubbed her forehead. But it didn’t matter; Mo Xuanyu was asleep before she could reply.

“I’ll have to go tell zongzhu that he woke,” she sighed, and left without a backwards glance.

Lan Wangji blinked after her, but did not otherwise move.

Jiang Wanyin snorted at the sight of Wei Wuxian curled up as closely as possible next to Lan Wangji when he returned. He also, however, gently brushed some of Wei Wuxian’s hair from his face before going over to glare at the sleeping form of Mo Xuanyu. He continued sleeping, and since the healer wouldn’t allow him to be woken, Jiang Wanyin was forced to wait. He was only waiting for half an hour, however, before he was called away.

“Let me know if either of them wake, for real if it’s the kid,” he shot back over his shoulder as he was hustled out. The healer ignored him.

Lan Wangji arranged himself more comfortably against Wei Wuxian’s side, settling in for a long vigil. The motions, especially when it came to Wei Wuxian, were so familiar it took him almost no time to settle back into meditative state.

More food was sent in, and he requested his zither be brought as well.

Wei Wuxian frowned when he freed both his hands to be able to play; he settled for curling up almost in Lan Wangji’s lap as a compromise. Lan Wangji made no protest. He played their lullaby.

Wei Wuxian’s bare forehead smoothed out completely. Lan Wangji had sung it to him once, with Wei Wuxian in a similar state to this, feverish and in and out of consciousness. It had been a love song, of course, though Lan Wangji, at that point, could barely think about it as such without wanting to die of embarrassment.

He had heard Wei Wuxian play it, twice since, on Chenqing. Each time had caused goosebumps to erupt over his body. Wei Wuxian’s version of Lan Wangji’s love song to him was lovely, eerie and gentle and sad. It never failed to bring him close to tears. Every time, he wondered whether Wei Wuxian knew where he had heard it, whether he knew what it meant, whether it meant the same thing when he played it.

He had never found out. But, looking down at Wei Wuxian’s soft, open expression as he slept, he couldn’t help but hope that he could, one day soon.

Chapter End Notes

Every time I read the line where the healer pokes Wei Wuxian’s wound my stomach clenches in sympathy. Love you, nameless healer, but please be nice to my boy.

yin and yang

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Lan Wangji did not know exactly when he fell asleep. He had not slept the night before, and had sent a not inconsiderable amount of energy into healing spells. So it was not a surprise that he did.

But he was still quite disorientated when he woke at five the next morning. He was curled into Wei Wuxian, who was equally as curled into him.

Lan Wangji made to move, his limbs stiff from the unfamiliar sleeping position.

Wei Wuxian, however, mumbled a muffled complaint, and pulled him back again. Lan Wangji let himself be pulled, turning on his side to look, sleepy and tender, at Wei Wuxian's pillow creased face.

He reached out to press against the frown still lingering in the middle of his forehead, where his Charter mark no longer lay. Wei Wuxian's hand, however, clasped around his wrist before he made contact. It left Lan Wangji's hand hovering, an inch from his face.

"Wei Ying?" he whispered, and Wei Wuxian's eyes fluttered as he blinked them open.

He stared at Lan Wangji for a few seconds. Then he let go of his wrist and reached out, poking his cheek.

"Lan Zhan?" he rasped. "Are you real?"

"Yes," he said, gravely. "Are you?"

"No idea," he said, but seemed a little cheered by the prospect.

He blinked a few times more times, reaching up to rub his eyes. "Where are we?" he asked, looking around.

"Lotus Pier."

"Okay," Wei Wuxian said in his complaining voice. "Now you're not even trying."

Lan Wangji raised an eyebrow. "First you pretend to be Lan Zhan, in my *bed*, then you say we're at Lotus Pier. Next you'll tell me the sky has turned green and started raining soup."

"Well, it may not have come from the sky," Lan Wangji said, and sat up again. Wei Wuxian let him this time, though he looked a little disappointed. "But if you are up for it, you should have some food. And water."

“Okay, but that did actually come from the sky,” Wei Wuxian pointed out in an amused sort of way, and watched with languidly hooded eyes as Lan Wangji went to collect some water.

He came back over, and helped Wei Wuxian sit up to drink. “Who’s the kid over in the other bed?” he asked after a few sips.

“A necromancer called Mo Xuanyu.”

Wei Wuxian blinked at him. “A necromancer? In Lotus Pier?”

Lan Wangji did not point out that there were, in fact, two of them. “You do not recognise him?”

Wei Wuxian blinked again, then gave a snorting sort of laugh. “We don’t have some sort of necromancy club, Lan Zhan, how would I know him?”

“He was the one that brought you from Death.”

Wei Wuxian’s face focused on him intently. “Don’t try and explain this,” he said fiercely. “I know this is impossible, just please, let me have this. Don’t remind me of —” he looked away, and his eyes closed as if he couldn’t bear to continue looking at him.

Lan Wangji’s heart ached. He nodded, nonetheless. “Great,” Wei Wuxian sighed, and yawned. His eyes remained closed, and he leaned his head onto Lan Wangji’s shoulder.

After a few seconds, his breathing evened out once more into sleep.

Jiang Wanyin sailed in a couple of hours later. “Any news?” he asked impatiently, like Lan Wangji was personally responsible for Wei Wuxian not currently being awake.

“He woke, briefly, this morning. He drank some water, then fell back asleep.”

Jiang Wanyin looked like he wanted to protest not being told immediately, but gave it up with a wave of his hand. He sank down on the other side of Wei Wuxian.

“Go get some fresh air, eat something, talk to your annoying disciples,” he said, not really looking at Lan Wangji, though clearly addressing him. “I’ll stay until you get back.”

Lan Wangji was a sentimental man, but he was also a sensible one. He rose without any hint of his reluctance, only pausing when Wei Wuxian shifted restlessly at his absence. But Jiang Wanyin moved in closer on his other side, and Wei Wuxian settled.

Lan Wangji knew he needed to reassure his students of his wellbeing after his absence. However, he also desperately wanted to be clean, in clean robes. He snuck past them all to run a bath.

He didn’t take long. But once he was clean and presentable, he felt much more equal to facing their curious teenage eyes, his face more able to return to its usual impassiveness. The

raw feelings of the last two days were tucked away with his last strand of hair, and he glided back into his disciples' room.

"Hanguang-jun," they cried when they saw him, Lan Sizhui especially looking seconds away from hugging him.

He narrowly avoided it, but that didn't stop the boy from grinning ear to ear.

"Where have you been?" Lan Jingyi exclaimed, like an excitable parent.

Lan Wangji shot him a look. "A problem emerged that required my attention. It is not serious, but will likely take up the next few days."

They accepted this without question, though they also offered eagerly to help. He almost rejected them entirely out of hand, but paused when he saw Lan Sizhui's entreaty eyes.

Lan Sizhui had more right to be by Wei Wuxian's side than he did. He sighed. "No help will be necessary," he said to the group.

He gave them all instructions for how to spend the day, researching, practicing both sword and magic, and meditating. When they were all occupied, he took Lan Sizhui aside.

"You may come with me, if you wish," he said. Lan Sizhui looked delighted, though he raised his eyebrows a little at the assumed deception, grinning.

I wasn't lying, Lan Wangji thought to himself a little defensively. *No help was necessary.*

As usual, though, he had no way of articulating that into words, so kept his peace, leading Lan Sizhui back to the infirmary with steps a little quicker than his usual.

Wei Wuxian was still asleep when they walked in, though the healer was up and bustling about. "Oh good," she said briskly, when she noticed them. "I was just about to wake him, I assumed you wanted to be here for that?"

Mo Xuanyu was already awake - he was sitting up and watching the proceedings with drowsy owl eyes, a tray of food balanced on his lap.

Lan Sizhui was also wide-eyed, though much more alert, examining first Mo Xuanyu, then Jiang Wanyin, kneeling by one of the cots, then —

"Hanguang-jun," he whispered. "Who is that?"

The healer made to wake up Wei Wuxian up, and Lan Wangji, eyes fixed on him, answered without thinking, "Wei Ying."

Wei Wuxian woke up, and looked at him. "Wei Wuxian," Jiang Wanyin said, almost a correction, and his eyes snapped to the side.

"Jiang Cheng," he said, and burst into tears. Jiang Wanyin tackled him in a hug, though it was, all things considered, a very gentle tackle. They hugged for a very long time, Jiang

Wanyin hiding his face is Wei Wuxian's hair.

When they finally pulled back, Wei Wuxian still kept a hand around Jiang Wanyin's arm. "Why, why," he began, still sniffing. "Why do you look so old?"

Jiang Wanyin's mouth dropped open in offence. "It's just," Wei Wuxian continued, blithely. "I had a lovely dream of Lan Zhan earlier, and he looked as ethereal as always, so I was just wondering —"

"I. Do not. Look. Old," Jiang Wanyin said through gritted teeth.

Wei Wuxian laughed, looking past him to where Lan Wangji stood. "See?" he said, and pointed. "Ethereal."

"I'll show you ethereal!" Jiang Wanyin yelled.

"Boys, if you can't play nice, then one of you is getting kicked out," the healer said, looking both exasperated and amused. "And it will not be the invalid, so save me from having to kick out a sect leader, eh?"

"Of course!" Wei Wuxian grinned. "I'll be on my best behaviour, as usual."

Jiang Wanyin rolled his eyes. "You have literally never behaved yourself in your entire life."

His brother gave a gasp of mock offence. "Healer, Jiang Cheng is trying to pick a fight, I'm sorry, but you have to kick him out now."

"Make him eat this," the healer said, ignoring him, and thrust a bowl of soup at Jiang Wanyin. He looked at it like he'd never seen one before, and Wei Wuxian laughed, and took it off him.

"Oh, it's not pork and lotus soup," he said, sounding a little disappointed, though he still kept eating. "Which is a little unfair of my dream, you'd think I'd get to choose." He sighed around his mouthful. "Jiang Cheng is bullying me as usual, subpar soup, shijie isn't here, Lan Zhan's standing all the way over there, a truly mediocre dream."

Lan Wangji made as if to move closer, and Wei Wuxian grinned up at him. "Oh, don't worry, dream Lan Zhan, I respect your decision for personal space, very in-character, I approve."

Then he looked next to him, at Lan Sizhui. "You're new," he said, squinting a little. "Who're you?"

Lan Sizhui looked at him searchingly for a few moments. "Where do I know you from?" he asked, his voice almost lost.

Wei Wuxian blinked at him. "Well," he said uncertainly, "I asked you first?"

"Forgive me," Lan Sizhui said, a little flustered, and bowed, because he was a truly outrageously polite teenager. "My name is... Wen Yuan, courtesy name Sizhui."

Clearly he had decided, at the last second, to use his family's surname. It was a necessity, when he first started studying cultivation with the Lan clan, to change his name to a name not reviled throughout the entire cultivation world. But Wen Sizhui had a feeling that his real name would mean something different to Wei Wuxian.

The man turned pale. "This is turning into a very strange dream," he muttered, not taking his eyes off of Wen Sizhui.

"Why do you keep saying this is a dream?" Jiang Wanyin snapped. "If this was a dream, would you have blubbered all over my shoulder at the sight of me?"

"I could always cry at your face," Wei Wuxian said. "A hideous sight."

"Fuck you."

Wei Wuxian grinned, though it faded slightly as he tilted his head to look at Jiang Wanyin. "You truly think this is realistic? You still talking to me, Lan Zhan's... existence, a-Yuan being a teenager, whatever that teenage necromancer's name in the other bed is..." He looked over at him. "Sorry, no offence, I was half asleep when I last heard it and I'm really bad at names."

"No problem," Mo Xuanyu said, looking nervous at his inclusion.

"Anyway, you think any of this is realistic?" he continued, looking back at Jiang Wanyin. "I'm dead."

Chapter End Notes

Dead sexy.

Not gonna lie, absolutely love when Wei Wuxian bullies Jiang Cheng about his looks in fics, as if the actor's jawline isn't literally the most amazing thing I've ever seen. That's brothers for you, though 😏😁

and know you are alive

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Jiang Wanyin scowled. “Fuck off with that shit, you’ve got a pulse.”

Wei Wuxian gave him a look that was almost gentle. “Jiang Cheng —”

“No, seriously, shut the fuck up,” he said angrily. “You’re alive, you’re in Life, the reason why everything seems weird is because it’s been over a decade!” He ended on a yell, and then said, softer, worn with grief, “You were in Death for thirteen years.”

Wei Wuxian just looked at him. “That’s not... that’s...” he looked around wildly for a few seconds, as if to find something to prove him wrong. “How do I know that I’m even out of Death?”

“You think you are dreaming,” Lan Wangji stated. “In Death.”

“Yeah?”

“Dreams are always strange. Why would this one seem so bizarre to you?” the healer piped up, reasonably.

Lan Wangji knelt and pictured the two original rabbits that Wei Wuxian had once gifted him. Holding them firmly in his mind, he reached for the Charter.

He could not create proper Charter constructs, of course, not with so little preparation. But he would be able to make something temporary.

With both hands he sketched out the shape he wanted the rabbits to take, then let them free. They bounced soundlessly over to an open mouthed Wei Wuxian, hopping up onto his blanket, the golden Charter marks that made up their bodies shimmering as they twisted and moved.

“Touch them,” Lan Wangji said. “Charter magic cannot exist in Death. Touch them, and know you are in Life.”

Wei Wuxian, for just a second, looked at him with such intensity that Lan Wangji felt his gaze like the heat of the sun against his skin. He wanted to melt under it, the ice everyone said he was made of trickling away in merry streams of water.

Then Wei Wuxian looked away, and touched one of golden rabbits, hand barely skimming it, as if afraid the touch would hurt it, or him.

He hissed in a sharp breath as the Charter marks bent like water around his fingertips, flowing up and around his hand like a blessing. The rabbit turned, and looked up at him with dark eyes. Then it collapsed into scattered drops of Charter marks, like foam from a wave

breaking onto the shore. Wei Wuxian's hand was left still outstretched, the individual marks trickling from it gently. He watched them for a moment with regret, a trace of wonder still silver in his eyes.

As the last of them faded, he looked back up to Lan Wangji. "You are alive," he told Wei Wuxian, no compromise in his voice.

"And you better fucking stay that way, or I'll murder you myself for a-jie's sake," Jiang Wanyin added, then, in an undertone, "Seriously, fucking bunnies?"

Wei Wuxian looked at his brother, something almost fragile on his face. "Shijie?"

"She's fine," Jiang Wanyin answered gruffly. "I sent word - she'll probably be here within the week, sooner if I know her."

Wei Wuxian started crying again. "And the rest of the people at the Burial Mound?" he looked up to Wen Sizhui. "Your, your family?"

"My popo died a few years ago," Wen Sizhui said, a lingering sorrow around his smile. "But all of them are well. I visited only a few weeks ago."

"I can't believe popo lasted a decade longer than me," Wei Wuxian said, wiping a few fresh tears from under his eyes and sniffing. "What an impressive woman."

"You lived with us," Wen Sizhui said slowly, like he was testing the words out loud. "You ___"

He cut off, as if waiting for Wei Wuxian to fill in the gaps. Wei Wuxian smiled up at him, and gave a gasping little laugh. "I babysat you, every now and then," he said, trying for an airy tone and failing utterly.

"Xian-gege," Wen Sizhui said softly. "You once tried to convince me I was a turnip, and buried me in the ground."

"That actually happened multiple times," Wei Wuxian said, and gave a watery grin. "I'm a great babysitter."

Wen Sizhui smiled back. "I think you looked after me a lot," he said, and his smile faded. "I think I cried for days when they said you weren't coming back."

"I was a great babysitter," Wei Wuxian repeated, and started sobbing. "Can you please get over here and hug me, actually?"

Wen Sizhui crossed the room and they folded together into a hug, both of them crying.

"Why are you so big, I'm so against this," Wei Wuxian huffed after a few moments, and Wen Sizhui muffled a giggle into his shoulder.

"Guess the whole, 'planting me like a radish' thing really did work."

“Like I said,” Wei Wuxian sniffed, and pulled away to hold him at arm’s length, examining him. “Only a great babysitter would be able to make such polite young man.”

“Okay, okay, enough with the reunions,” the healer said. “He needs rest.”

“Of course,” Wen Sizhui, and made to stand. Wei Wuxian caught him by his wrist and pulled him down again.

“A-Yuan is my emotional support toddler slash teenager,” he said, looking up at the healer with shining, beseeching eyes. “It would be cruel to send him out, I’m his favourite babysitter.”

The healer rolled her eyes, and made him drink more water. If there were going to be more tears, was her clear thought process, he would at least be hydrated for it.

Jiang Wanyin was soon called away on sect business, and Wei Wuxian, who had been struggling to keep awake, swiftly slipped again into sleep.

Wen Sizhui looked up from his position by Wei Wuxian with a smile. “Don’t worry,” he said to Lan Wangji, “I’m happy to stay with him, if you need to attend to other business.”

It was an unwelcome reminder to Lan Wangji that he was intruding. He was aware of the fact that he had never held a particularly important position in Wei Wuxian’s life. They may have saved each other in more ways than Lan Wangji could count, but... Wei Wuxian had saved a lot of people.

And he had never managed to save Wei Wuxian from the things that truly mattered.

When they were younger, Wei Wuxian had started calling him by his personal name solely to get a rise out of him. It had never meant, Lan Wangji knew, what he had meant by calling him *Wei Ying* in return.

He nodded tightly to Wen Sizhui, and turned to leave.

“Um,” Mo Xuanyu said. “Hanguang-jun?”

He paused, and looked over. The boy was awake, though still very pale. “Do you, uh, happen to know where Nie-zongzhu is?”

“I have not seen her,” he replied seriously. He had wondered what she had been doing since Wei Wuxian transformed, for it was obvious to him that a teenager would have very little reason to try to rescue him in the first place.

“Oh, she got a summons saying she was needed back in her own sect,” Wen Sizhui piped up. “She headed back yesterday, I think.”

“Why was Nie Mingjue here anyway?” Wei Wuxian said into his pillow, without opening his eyes.

Wen Sizhui looked at Lan Wangji, Lan Wangji looked at Mo Xuanyu, and Mo Xuanyu looked awkward.

“Uh,” he said, and rubbed the back of his neck. “Well, the Nie sect leader is actually now Nie Huaisang, and she was here for some... sect business, I don’t know, with Jiang-zongzhu, and I was... with her.”

Wei Wuxian opened one eye, frowned lopsidedly at Mo Xuanyu, then closed it again. “None of that makes any sense, but don’t try and explain, I’ll figure it out later.”

Then he rolled over to face Wen Sizhui. “A-Yuan, you’re a sweetheart, but even though you’re not a toddler anymore, you’re still young. Go off and do... youth things. Lan Zhan, who’s apparently old now, though his face has *literally* not changed, can keep me company.”

“Youth things,” Wen Sizhui repeated, amused.

“I’m sure you can figure something out,” Wei Wuxian mumbled, already drifting off again. Lan Wangji, given explicit permission, once again sank down next to him, and Wen Sizhui clambered to his feet, mouth set in amusement, though his eyes lingered on Wei Wuxian a little sadly as he left.

“Seriously, though,” Wei Wuxian said when he next woke up. “How did you just get more beautiful in thirteen years? I feel like that’s impossible? Like, look what happened to Jiang Cheng.”

In Lan Wangji’s opinion, Jiang Wanyin had changed little over the years, only, perhaps, getting more angular and severe looking. He suspected Wei Wuxian was just being petty.

“The advantages of no longer being twenty-three,” Lan Wangji said serenely, “are innumerable.”

Wei Wuxian blinked at him. “Was that an insult? I can’t tell if that was an insult.”

“As I said.”

“Are you making fun of me?” he asked, grinning in delight. “Have you finally learned how to make a joke? Man, I really have missed a lot.”

“Mn,” Lan Wangji. “You have.”

“Aw, did you miss me Lan Zhan?”

“Yes,” he said.

He blinked. “Oh,” he said in a small voice. “Are you teasing again?”

“I am not,” Lan Wangji said. “I missed you.”

Wei Wuxian gave a half smile, and his customary deflection. “Bet you were the only one in the cultivation world who could say that, eh? You at least clearly realised, only tragically too late, how charming I am, but they were all breathing sighs of relief, huh?”

“No. Jiang Wanyin and Jiang Yanli both missed you deeply, and many others in the cultivation world regretted your situation.”

Wei Wuxian looked away, and said, voice cracking, “But they were better off without me, right? Without my reputation dragging them down, Jiang Cheng and shijie, they were better off?”

Lan Wangji looked at him for a few long moments, sorrow a familiar weight in his chest. “I cannot say how the future would have turned out, had you returned to Life with Jiang Yanli,” he said finally, and didn’t add, *Though I have thought on it ceaselessly ever since*. “But I do know that they have considered their lives the worse for your absence.”

Wei Wuxian’s head was down, eyes closed, strands of hair striping his face in light and shadow, black and gold. “You are a lot more forgiving of the things I have done than you were before,” he whispered.



“I never had any right to judge you,” Lan Wangji said plainly. “And it was my error to ever think I did.”

Wei Wuxian was still for a long moment before he slanted a sideways glance at Lan Wangji through his hair.

“You missed me, huh?” he said, a tiny grin on his face, and because he was clearly desperate for an end to the serious discussion, and, because he was Wei Wuxian, for a reaction, Lan Wangji took pity on him, and gave him one.

He looked at Wei Wuxian, and he smiled. “You’re back,” he said simply.

Chapter End Notes

 He's back! 

Wei Wuxian: But I made the right decision, right? I didn't just waste thirteen years of my loved one's lives, my self sacrifice was worth it?

Lan Wangji: ... I want to reassure you right now, but I am actually physically incapable of not telling you how much I missed you, sorry.

did we ever deserve the punishment we have recieved for being who we are?

Chapter Notes

Ref. for Chinese [terms](#).

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

“So,” Wei Wuxian started casually, and Mo Xuanyu, the only other person in the room, blinked over at him. “Why’ve you got a bandage on your hand?”

“It won’t heal with Charter Magic,” he said, shrugging awkwardly.

“Oh, what? Don’t tell me you cut your hand deliberately so you could get into Death?” Wei Wuxian exclaimed in apparent dismay.

“Um, I’m not really powerful enough to just get there on my own, and there were a lot of wards...”

“Yeah, no shit,” Wei Wuxian said impatiently, “but that doesn’t mean you have to cut your hand!”

“Why?”

“Do you have any idea how many sensitive nerves and tendons are in your palms?”

“No. Do you?”

“No backtalk, young man, it’s a lot, okay! Just cut your arm next time, like the depressed teen necromancer you are.”

“Uncalled for,” Mo Xuanyu muttered. “Besides, it’s a little awkward to like, wipe your arm blood on whatever you need it for. The hand is easy, I just reached out and grabbed you.”

“What’s more awkward, an arm wipe or trying to hold chopsticks right now?”

“Touché.”

“Honestly, and your dominant hand as well!”

“Well, it’s meant to be a blood sacrifice,” Mo Xuanyu said, folding his arms and pouting mulishly. “It’s a greater sacrifice from the dominant hand, I read it somewhere.”

“Dominant *arm*.”

“Oh, fine, you want to be nitpicky, whatever, but I *still* haven’t heard a thank you for getting you out of Death in the first place! *I* rescued *you*.”

“And you made the decision to do that all on your own, huh?”

Mo Xuanyu glared at him, and Wei Wuxian grinned smugly back.

“I’m more awake now,” he continued. “So tell me what’s going on. Why is Nie Huaisang now sect leader? Why did she want to resurrect me? Who on earth did you learn necromancy from, you’re like, twelve?”

“I’m almost eighteen,” he hissed. “And who I learnt it from doesn’t matter. Though, uh. What makes you think Nie-zongzhu had anything to do with it?”

“She’s a Clayr,” Wei Wuxian stated matter-of-factly. “She probably thought I could be useful to her in some way, but how, I literally cannot fathom.”

“How did you know she’s Clayr?” Mo Xuanyu whispered in some consternation. “That’s one of her most closely guarded secrets!”

“Um, can’t be that closely guarded if both you and I know about it,” Wei Wuxian said blithely. “Anyway, did Nie Mingjue die? Who would’ve dared kill him?”

“Apparently he died after his blade was corrupted with Free Magic, and it spread to him.”

“That seems... possible. But also unlikely.”

“Yeah.”

“So,” Wei Wuxian said contemplatively, “who do you think did it?”

“Jin Guangyao,” Mo Xuanyu said with no hesitation.

“Huh,” Wei Wuxian said, squinting a little. “Good for him.”

Mo Xuanyu glared at him. “Jin Guangyao ruined my life!” he exclaimed heatedly.

“Oh, really?”

“Why are you more surprised by that than the possibility that he murdered Nie Mingjue?”

“Well, he’s such a people pleaser? I can’t imagine him trying to ruin anyone’s life? But also, I have seen him literally murder a man in cold blood, stab him right in the back, so, uh. Forgot where I was going with that.”

“I’m his half brother,” Mo Xuanyu said, a little bleakly. “And when Jin Zixuan decided he was going to step down from his duties as sect heir, my father decided to legitimise me.”

“Damn,” he said, stretching it out. “I missed a whole bunch of shenanigans, didn’t I?”

Mo Xuanyu didn’t reply. “Anyway, I can kind of guess from there. How’d he ruin your life?”

“Made it seem like I was a pervert who was sexually harassing his wife at Koi Tower,” he replied tonelessly. “Then he sent me back to my abusive aunt, uncle, and cousin without letting finishing my training to be a cultivator.”

Wei Wuxian whistled. “Sucks. But also, you’re clearly gay?”

“I am gay,” Mo Xuanyu said, scowling. “Try defending yourself with that to a whole bunch of judgmental, traditionalist pricks, though, see how that works out.”

Wei Wuxian nodded. “Fair enough. Still, take it from me, probably a poor move to become a necromancer just because you didn’t finish your other training.”

“Oh, fuck you too.”

Lan Wangji glided gracefully into the room, two trays of food balanced on one arm, and raised a single, elegant eyebrow.

“Making friends,” Wei Wuxian told him cheerfully. Then added, “Is that for me?” with an innocent glint in his eyes.

Lan Wangji nodded, giving him a bowl, then walked over to give Mo Xuanyu one too.

“Well,” the healer said, standing straight from her examination of Mo Xuanyu. “You’re better. There’s honestly not much else I can do for you, apart from advising rest, staying warm, and keeping that hand of yours clean.” She muttered in an aside, “Damn fool thing to do, cutting your palm.”

“Oh, hey, that’s what I said,” Wei Wuxian said brightly from his cot, where he’d been shamelessly listening in.

Mo Xuanyu set his jaw resentfully, but otherwise ignored them. “So I’m free to go.”

“You’re free to leave the infirmary,” she corrected. “I’d report to the zongzhu if I valued my life.”

“Right,” Mo Xuanyu said, his hair swinging down to cover his face as he swung his legs off the cot.

He made his way to the door, giving Wei Wuxian’s cot a wide berth, which was why the man in question had to lunge to catch a hold of his arm. Behind him, unnoticed, Lan Wangji indulged in an eye roll, and a tiny smirk.

“You know,” Wei Wuxian said. “It kind of seems like you might be in need of a teacher.”

“In what, necromancy?” Mo Xuanyu asked incredulously.

“Yeah. Not sure if you’ve heard of me, but I used to be pretty well known for it.”

“Oh, really? The Yiling Patriarch, Lord of the Dead, Wei Wuxian, you were a necromancer?”

“Shocking, I know. Anyway, you know. Just saying that you don’t need to rush off, if you don’t want to. I’ve got loads of wisdom.”

“Not sure how wise the guy who got himself trapped in Death for thirteen years could be.”

“Maybe not the wisest,” Wei Wuxian admitted. “But I sure do know a lot about necromancy.”

Mo Xuanyu paused for a long moment. “I think... that there are a lot of things that I need to think about.”

“Yeah, dude, you think about things. Definitely not about to pressure you, honestly, choosing my path is, probably, not the best choice out there. Don’t rush into anything! Especially Death. Words of wisdom,” he said, winking.

Mo Xuanyu huffed out a laugh. “Sure.”

He pulled his arm free, but paused again at the doorway. “I’ll think about it,” he said seriously, a promise, and left.

“Why are all of you young people *so* dramatic?” the healer wondered out loud, then turned to Wei Wuxian.

“Now you, I’m not sure can be trusted to rest if I let you go,” she said, hands on her hips. She had her reasons - before he had been known as the Lord of the Dead, his teachers, especially Lan Qiren, Lan Wangji’s uncle, had known him as Lord of Distraction and Fidgeting.

Since he had started being awake for more than twenty minutes at a time, it had been increasingly difficult to keep him bed.

He would make up all sorts of ridiculous reasons, would demand things to do, would attempt a distraction and then dive off the other side of the bed, and, when he was found escaping, would give his most innocent expression to whoever caught him. Lan Wangji was the one who bore the brunt of this, but never wavered in his insistence on Wei Wuxian’s rest.

Wei Wuxian gave the healer another look of wide-eyed virtue. “There is literally no one more trustworthy, even Hanguang-jun here is less trustworthy! You can definitely trust me to rest!”

She looked at Lan Wangji, eyebrows raised. “I will make sure he rests,” he said in response to the eyebrows, and she smirked.

Wei Wuxian pouted. “I literally just said he was less trustworthy.”

“All I know is that he has been a very good nurse while he has been here,” she said, raising her hands and still looking like she was about to laugh. “And you have been a truly terrible patient.”

“I resent that remark. But also, Lan Zhan, you *have* been a very lovely nurse, and you deserve a least two personal favours from me for your dedication. Name them, and I’ll do them,” he

said with a wink.

“I don’t want to hear about your sex life, especially when I just told you to rest,” the healer said. Wei Wuxian gaped at her. “Now get out of my workplace.”

“Lan Zhan!” he gasped. “Aren’t you going to tell her off for that? She just implied something *so* scandalous!”

“Nothing could be more scandalous than your existence,” Lan Wangji said dryly as he helped Wei Wuxian stand.

Wei Wuxian threw an arm over one of his broad shoulders, and turned to look at him. Their faces were very close.

“I could be more scandalous,” he said, as if imparting a secret.

“You could be,” Lan Wangji agreed.

“Oh? And how would Lan-er-gege suggest I —”

“I literally,” interrupted the healer, “just said to get out of my workplace.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Wei Wuxian said, waving his hand airily, and, with Lan Wangji’s help, made it out of the room.

“You know,” he said thoughtfully, having apparently forgotten to continue their previous conversation. “I didn’t really believe you when you said we were in Lotus Pier.”

Lan Wangji hummed, but made no other reply.

Wei Wuxian was quiet, for a time, as they made their way over the boardwalks. His eyes were wide as he took everything in.

“I never thought I would be allowed to come back,” he whispered, and there was the grief again, a shadow in his otherwise bright eyes.

It was not a grief Lan Wangji could easily empathise with. Though the Cloud Recesses had once been burned to the ground by the Wens, he had helped rebuild it. There had never been any doubt that he would always be able to call it home, should he wish.

Still, his heart ached for the sadness in Wei Wuxian’s eyes.

They reached Lan Wangji’s quarters without incident, though Wei Wuxian was clearly exhausted by the exercise. Lan Wangji let him sink onto a chair without comment, and went to collect the things he needed.

Wei Wuxian watched him quietly, and gave a tired grin when he realised what he was doing. “Got so dirty hauling me over here that you needed another bath, eh, Lan Zhan?”

“The bath is for you,” Lan Wangji said without looking up.

“My point remains,” he said, still grinning. “I must really stink if the first thing you do —” he stopped to sniff under his arm, and grimaced. “Okay, actually, fair.”

Lan Wangji poured more hot water into the bath, and the steam misted around his face in gentle wisps. Wei Wuxian made himself look away.

“You didn’t have to do that, you know,” he said, gaze still averted.

“As you implied,” Lan Wangji murmured, “it is more for my sake than yours.”

Wei Wuxian huffed a laugh. “I didn’t mean the bath.” He grinned. “Feel free to bath me anytime,” he said in an overtly lecherous voice, winking.

Lan Wangji didn’t react, coming over without comment to help Wei Wuxian to his feet. His legs trembled with the effort, and he leaned more heavily than he anticipated against Lan Wangji.

He eased Wei Wuxian down next to the bath. There was a privacy screen set around it, and Lan Wangji paused by it, staring at him seriously.

“Wei Ying. I will help you bath if you need. If you want.”

Wei Wuxian almost made it into a joke. It was on the tip of his tongue to do so. But he looked away instead, a small, almost sincere smile tucked into the corner of his mouth. He undressed, sliding into the bath, Lan Wangji’s gaze a luxurious weight on his bare skin.

He ducked his head beneath the water, before leaning back, hair billowing out in a storm cloud around him, dark robes or black blood in the water. He watched it swirl, tendrils gently curving towards his throat, mouth contemplative.

“Were you punished?” he asked, still not looking at Lan Wangji, eyes on the patterns his hair made as it moved through the water.

“Punished,” Lan Wangji said, not quite a question.

“For helping me. At the Burial Mound. Were you punished?”

Lan Wangji did not reply.

“You can just tell me,” Wei Wuxian said, looking up, eyes focused. “I know what your silence means.”

“You always have.”

“What?”

“You’ve always known me. You’ve always *looked*.”

“Looked at you? Everyone looks at you.”

“Not like you do. You have always looked at me, and seen —” he broke off, grasping for the right word.

“A person,” Wei Wuxian finished quietly. He gave a slight smile. “You did not always appreciate me trying to get the more human side of you out in the open.”

“I was fifteen,” Lan Wangji said, and Wei Wuxian’s smile turned into a grin. “No one had ever wanted me to be anything other than perfect, before.”

“That was your fault for being perfect.”

“I wasn’t. I’m not,” he said, and his voice was uncharacteristically raw.

Wei Wuxian’s voice was quiet again as he said, “I know. I’ve always known.”

They looked at each other.

“Your reputation may have been confining,” Wei Wuxian continued, eyes back on the water. “May still be, I don’t know. But at least it...” his voice trailed off.

“Kept me safe. I wanted it to keep you safe, once.”

Wei Wuxian glanced up at him, and was surprised to see his own grief reflected back at him. “It wouldn’t have worked,” he said, uncertainty making him blunt.

“It didn’t work, no. You wouldn’t come with me.”

Wei Wuxian was silent for a long moment. “You just wanted to keep me safe?” he asked, his voice cracking on the last word. “When you asked me to come with you to Gusu?”

“Always,” Lan Wangji said. The air was very still between them. “But you’re right,” he continued, and his voice was achingly sad. “It probably wouldn’t have worked. You are Wei Ying, and I could not have changed that, and would not have wanted to.”

“It still wasn’t worth it. *I* still wasn’t worth it. Whatever punishment you received was on *me*, because of my mistakes. You shouldn’t have had to defend me from the consequences of my own actions.”

“Were they true consequences? Were they the result of true judgment? Or were you vilified against your will, in defiance of your true actions?”

“I did what I had to, to do what I thought was right,” Wei Wuxian said, his voice weary. “But the punishment was still less than what I deserved.”

Lan Wangji knelt by the side of the bath, and Wei Wuxian jerked in surprise. He took Wei Wuxian’s face between his palms, and he could do nothing but stare at him, wide eyed.

“What we do or do not deserve,” Lan Wangji said with a quiet ferocity. “I do not pretend to know. Your choices were your own, and my choices were my own, and if we ever deserved punishment for them, we have received enough.”

His breathing was a little rougher as he brushed a wet strand of Wei Wuxian's hair behind his ear. "You wanted to keep me safe too, that's why you pushed me away. But please. Let me make my own choices. Let me choose you."

Wei Wuxian kissed him.

Chapter End Notes

The Old Kingdom trilogy - No necromancer apart from the Abhorsen is good, all of them are evil, Free Magic corrupts absolutely.

Me and Wei Wuxian - Hmm, I don't think so actually. I think you are confusing taking a different path/being different with morality again.

Lan Wangji - Is it a sin, to go off the beaten track? Is it a sin, to love someone we are not meant to? Did we ever deserve punishment for being who we are? Did we ever have a choice? Do we want to overthrow the heavens? Does the walker choose the path, or the path choose the walker?

can i try again, try again, try again

Chapter Notes

Title from Mitski's Pink in the Night.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

It was just a quick peck, a snowflake's kiss that melted on the skin. Wei Wuxian quickly pulled back again, eyes wide like he wasn't quite sure what he'd just done.

Lan Wangji did not let him go far. One hand found its way to the back of Wei Wuxian's neck, the other braced on the other side of the bath, and he kissed him, and kissed him, and kissed him. His hand tangled in Wei Wuxian's hair, and he used it to pull him closer.

Wei Wuxian gasped against his mouth, a near silent thing, and Lan Wangji licked into the opening.

Everything suddenly became a lot slicker, and the water splashed as Wei Wuxian attempted to get closer to him.

"Should we move this to a different arena?" he gasped against Lan Wangji's mouth.

"You should finish your bath," Lan Wangji murmured back, then pulled Wei Wuxian's lip between his teeth as if to prevent him from doing so.

"Lan Zhan. Lan Zhan, you're being so mean to me," he whined, but made no move to stop him.

Lan Wangji pulled away, mouth red and wet. Wei Wuxian stared at it for a moment before registering the move. "Lan Zhan, where are you going?"

"Letting you finish your bath," Lan Wangji replied, doing an admirable job of not appearing breathless, and stood.

"I take it back, Lan Zhan, I take it back, you're bullying me properly now, come back!" Wei Wuxian said, and attempted to stand. Lan Wangji set a hand on his shoulder and pushed him gently back down.

"Wei Ying," he said. "Finish your bath." He kissed him on the forehead, walking behind the screen with measured steps.

Wei Wuxian gave a grumbling, "So rude, so cruel," under his breath, but didn't immediately follow him out, which Lan Wangji, somewhat regretfully, counted as a win.

There came a knock on the door of his rooms, thankfully while Wei Wuxian was still in the bath. Lan Wangji went to answer it, grateful that he had gotten a few minutes to compose himself.

“If it’s Jiang Cheng, tell him to fuck off,” Wei Wuxian whisper-shouted from the bath, and Lan Wangji bit his lip to prevent his amusement from showing as he opened the door.

It was not Jiang Cheng.

“Hanguang-jun,” Lan Jingyi and Wen Sizhui chorused, and bowed.

“Is it true that the Yiling Patriarch is back?” Lan Jingyi burst out eagerly. “That you’ve imprisoned him with you?”

“Imprisoned in the bathtub,” floated out from behind the screen.

“Imprisoned in the bathtub?” Lan Jingyi repeated in awe.

Lan Wangji looked at Wen Sizhui for help. “We came to see Xian-gege, since we heard from the healer that he’d recovered enough to move, but we can come back a little later if he’s occupied?”

Lan Wangji nodded, and closed the door again.

Wei Wuxian laugh drifted out from behind the screen like music. “How soon will they be back, do you think?” he asked, laughter still colouring his question like the sunset dyes the sky.

“Too soon,” he said, and Wei Wuxian laughed again.

“Do we have long enough to make-out some more?”

“Finish your bath.”

“Or what?”

“Wei Ying will go tragically kiss-less until he does.”

Wei Wuxian gasped. “Awful villain that you are!”

He did, however, finish his bath. But it was in vain to hope that he would get more kisses for it; another knock came almost as soon as he tied the final knot on his robes.

“Lan Zhan, I’m blaming you for my new popularity, I want you to know.”

“That would be an erroneous judgment,” he said, and pulled the door open once again.

Jiang Wanyin glared at him from the doorway, arms crossed. “Why wasn’t I informed that Wei Wuxian was no longer in the infirmary until after you’d kidnapped him?”

“Oh, it’s Jiang Cheng this time,” Wei Wuxian said cheerfully, peeking out from behind the screen. “Fuck off.”

Jiang Cheng spluttered.

“Sorry, bro,” he continued, grinning. “Lan Zhan and I were just making out, so I figured you wouldn’t want to be there for that.”

“You’re the worst and I hate you, please don’t tell me these things,” Jiang Cheng said, closing his eyes as if to block out the mental image.

“Aw, love you too, baby bro,” Wei Wuxian said, attempting to bounce over, and almost falling over in the process. Lan Wangji caught him, and, using him as leverage, Wei Wuxian launched himself at Jiang Cheng, rubbing his hair into an unruly mess.

Jiang Cheng shrieked madly, and tried desperately to dislodge him. He eventually dumped him back onto Lan Wangji, and said, as he attempted unsuccessfully to smooth his hair back down, “I am now twelve years older than you, *you* are the baby brother!”

“Once a baby brother,” Wei Wuxian said, grinning so wide his eyes were almost closed with the force of it, and panting with the exertion. “Always a baby brother. Sorry, I don’t make the rules.”

“Like hell,” Jiang Cheng muttered, but he was also struggling not to laugh.

“The rules were actually made by shijie,” Wei Wuxian informed him. “So you can’t make fun of them.”

Jiang Cheng rolled his eyes. “I’ve heard back from her, by the way. She’ll be here in two days.”

Wei Wuxian vibrated a little, though even he was unsure why. “Great!” he said. “What about —”

“WEI WUXIAN!”

“Hide me,” he said to Lan Wangji, and got behind him.

“Oh, great, just shout his name, not like I’ve done my best to keep his presence here a secret,” Jiang Cheng said in an exasperated undertone.

“WHERE IS THAT FUCKER?”

“Oh, I’m dead, I’m dead, I’m so dead,” Wei Wuxian said, muffled against Lan Wangji’s robes, before using his new position to slide his arms around Lan Wangji’s stomach and cuddle him. Wei Wuxian was not the sort of person to waste opportunities.

“Please stop shouting, over here!” Jiang Cheng, the traitor, yelled back, and Wei Wuxian gave a theatrical shiver of fear. He pressed even closer along Lan Wangji’s back, then hooked his chin over his shoulder, eyes closed.

They popped open, however, quickly enough.

“YOU!” came a voice that promised death, and he cowered as he saw the red tipped fingernail pointed straight at him.

“It wasn’t me!” he shrieked, and ducked his head down again. His arms, however, stayed firmly around Lan Wangji.

“THIRTEEN YEARS! IT WASN’T THE *MASTER OF DEATH* WEI WUXIAN WHO SPENT THIRTEEN YEARS TRAPPED IN DEATH?”

“Hm, actually, that might have been me,” Wei Wuxian piped up meekly.

“I’M GONNA SEND YOU BACK THERE!” Wen Qing bellowed, and, dodging nimbly around Lan Wangji, grabbed Wei Wuxian, shook him roughly, and crushed him in a hug.

“If it hadn’t been, like, a week since I remember last seeing you,” Wei Wuxian said against the top of her head. “I would’ve missed you too.”

“Charter, you’re the worst,” she said, wiping her tears on his robes.

“Ew, I literally just had a bath,” he informed her.

She sniffed a few times. “I wondered why this hug was so tolerable, considering it’s like hugging a bag of bones.”

“You’re free to let go at any time.”

“Fuck off.”

When she finally stepped back, she did so with a casual elegance, rapidly regaining her dignity with the tilt of her chin. “Dick,” she said to him, a final pronouncement, then stepped aside to let her brother through.

He came up to Wei Wuxian somewhat shyly, clearly unsure of his reception. He made to bow, but Wei Wuxian moved in quicker, catching one of his arms and clasping it. He grinned at Wen Ning.

“Thanks for protecting everyone, back then,” he said, tone casual but eyes intent. “I would’ve hated to inflict Wen Qing on those innocent cultivators.”

“Yes, of course, because you were so merciful and kind to them,” Jiang Cheng said.

“No thanks are necessary, Wei-gongzi,” Wen Ning said, and smiled. “You have been missed.”

“Yeah, well, anyone would miss me,” Wei Wuxian said, tearing up. “I’m amazing.”

There were various scoffs from those present, but Wen Ning just continued to smile. “Pretty amazing, yeah.”

Wei Wuxian blinked to clear the mist from his eyes, and found the blink going on far longer than it should have.

Lan Wangji rested a hand on his shoulder.

“The healer probably told you to rest, didn’t they?” Wen Qing said in, if not in a less stern way, at least a more professional tone. Lan Wangji gave a quiet hum of agreement.

“No, I’m fine, I’m fine, I could stay up for hours,” Wei Wuxian protested around a yawn, and three different people around him rolled their eyes.

Lan Wangji pressed down on his shoulder, and steered him around towards the interior.

“Clearly I’m being... bullied into this, so I’ll be seeing you guys when I’m no, no longer captive,” Wei Wuxian said with his eyes mostly closed, and leaned against Lan Wangji all the way to the bed.

He could hear the sound of Wen Qing and Wen Ning and Jiang Cheng as they began to move away, but their voices brought him only comfort. He drifted off, Lan Wangji’s presence warm and golden around him, and for the first time in longer than he could remember, his sleep was dreamless and peaceful.

Chapter End Notes

Wen Qing, I've missed you ♥♥♥

oh, your love is sunlight

Chapter Notes

Title from Hozier's Sunlight.

See the end of the chapter for [more notes](#)

When he woke, he was sprawled entirely on top of Lan Wangji, a starfish or an octopus, heavy and loose-limbed, the only neat thing about him his head tucked beneath Lan Wangji's chin.

"Good morning," Lan Wangji said, his throat humming against his face. Wei Wuxian, like a cat, pressed closer to him, and made a "mfph" sound in response.

He seemed likely to drift back off, and it seemed likely that Lan Wangji would let him. He kissed him on the forehead, before glancing again at the book he was balancing on top of Wei Wuxian head, ready to continue reading.

Wei Wuxian, however, bolted upright. "Did you just kiss me on my Charter mark?" he exclaimed, and touched the place it had rested, between the brows where several furrows were currently carved.

Lan Wangji sat up as well, and calmly retrieved his book from where it had been flung. "No," he said, and nothing more.

Wei Wuxian stricken look was rapidly overtaken by confusion. "Where is my Charter mark?" he asked, blinking, and tapping his forehead rapidly.

"It disappeared when I touched it after you transformed," Lan Wangji said, and also frowned slightly, looking troubled. "The healer wouldn't let you inside before we confirmed you weren't corrupted, but..."

"It disappeared," Wei Wuxian repeated, and touched his forehead again, a lingering touch. "That's impossible."

Lan Wangji raised his eyebrow slightly. Wei Wuxian looked up, and his mouth twisted at the sight. "I know, I know, I seem like the last person to say that, but really, I've looked and looked, I researched this for, for years, and it is. It is impossible!"

"Why would you want to be rid of your Charter mark?" Lan Wangji asked, though he was already fairly, uncomfortably certain of the answer.

Wei Wuxian looked at him bleakly. "Mine was corrupted. I had been trapped in Death for too long, it was," he reached up and touched his blank forehead again, "ruined," he finished

softly.

“And you found no way to reverse these effects?” Lan Wangji said, heart aching, and answers, from questions that had been plaguing him for over fifteen years, coming to sudden, dreadful light.

“None. The Charter had spurned me, and there was no way for that to be undone,” he said, and frowned. “I cannot decide if this is a more thorough rejection, or...”

“A chance at redemption.”

Wei Wuxian looked at him. Lan Wangji continued. “That which is unbaptised may be baptised again.”

Wei Wuxian looked down at his hands. “I am not sure,” he said, voice hushed and a little choked. “Whether I am ready to commit again. Once burnt, twice cold, and all that.”

“There is no rush,” Lan Wangji said, and let his hand rest against the side of Wei Wuxian’s neck. “You are safe here, and all who you love are as well. If you like, you never have to be rebaptised. You can choose. There is a choice, and neither option will bring you harm. There is no rush,” he repeated, and pulled him into a hug as his tears began to flow.

“Charter, I’m so sick of crying,” he sniffled against Lan Wangji’s neck, but did not object, just twisted so that they fit together more closely, like puzzle pieces, yin and yang.

Lan Wangji said to him something he had often wished, when he was younger, for someone to tell him. “It is okay to cry,” he whispered into Wei Wuxian’s hair, and stroked over the long, tangled mess of it. “It’s okay.”

When his tears tapered off, Lan Wangji got to his feet and crossed the room, returning swiftly with a comb in his hand.

He knelt in front of Wei Wuxian. He, with a smile that was brighter after his tears, like the sun after rain, turned.

Lan Wangji gently, methodically, began combing, bringing, as he did best, order to chaos.

Wei Wuxian did not keep quiet. But, lulled by the repetitive motions of the comb, his thoughts were vocalised dreamily, drifting, less like his usual hummingbird quick thoughts, like a bee from flower to flower.

Lan Wangji finished tying his hair up, and Wei Wuxian turned and kissed him. It was light, but lingering. When he drew back, he gave Lan Wangji a very soft smile. “Can’t let you mess up my perfectly styled hair,” he said, faux solemn. Lan Wangji kissed him again, a silent disagreement.

Wei Wuxian conceded the point, but had to break away to laugh when there was a knock on the door.

“No rest for the wicked,” he sighed, and clambered to his feet and to the door.

“You’re on your feet!” Wen Sizhui greeted him with brightly, before remembering himself and bowing.

“The Yiling Patriarch escaped!” Lan Jingyi said with equal cheer, forgetting to bow. “I thought he’d be taller.”

“I am tall,” Wei Wuxian said, offended.

“Yeah, but the way people complain about him, you’d think he’d be like, giant sized, not the same height as Hanguang-jun.”

Lan Wangji loomed up behind Wei Wuxian.

“Not,” Lan Jingyi added hastily, “that Hanguang-jun isn’t very tall, still.”

“Exactly, which make me very tall,” Wei Wuxian said, looking pleased, and crossed his arms.

Wen Sizhui hid a smile behind his hand. “We met with Jiang-zongzhu on the way over here, and he, uh, requested, that if Xian-gege is well enough, to have him meet him on the docks?”

“Requested,” Wei Wuxian snorted, but gestured for them to lead the way, grabbing Lan Wangji’s hand and following after them.

“So, a-Yuan, when did you start studying with Lan Zhan, anyway?” he asked, cheerfully swinging their linked hands.

“I was quite young, I think. I’m not really sure how it was all arranged,” he said, looking at Lan Wangji. “But I’ve always been able to go back and visit my family as often as I want to, and I’ve truly loved studying with Hanguang-jun, and at the Cloud Recesses.”

“I made the offer,” Lan Wangji said quietly. “To your guardians, for you to study with me when you were older. You began your studies when you were seven.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed studying there, a-Yuan!” Wei Wuxian said, trying and failing not to give Lan Wangji a sappy look. “Did anyone ever tell you about the time I got kicked out?”

They had, but Wei Wuxian told the story nonetheless, with great enthusiasm.

They left the Jiang residence, and walked amongst the workers. Stalls were set up, colourful and bright, the people weaving amongst them even more so. They strolled along the boardwalks, Wei Wuxian’s hand in Lan Wangji’s, the sun hot against their skin. Wei Wuxian, still talking, tipped his face up towards the sky, eyes closed, the sun burning gold against his skin.

Lan Wangji watched him like he was a miracle made flesh. Perhaps he was.

On the river, the lotus flowers bloomed. Boats and barges made their way through them, and the leaves parted to let them by, before swaying back together, over and over again.

On the dock, a single figure stood, upright and still, looking out over the water. At the sound of Wei Wuxian's voice, though, he turned, and the stern lines of his face softened.

He did, however, roll his eyes to sky above them when he noticed who he was holding hands with.

"As always," he said as they approached, "I heard you before I saw you."

"I mean, you were standing with your back to us, so not surprising," Wei Wuxian said cheerfully, and shoved his shoulder.

Jiang Cheng didn't budge, though he did glare at him.

"Don't make me forget that you were recently on your deathbed," he warned.

Wei Wuxian grinned. "Heard you had me installed in the Ancestral Hall, very tasteful by the way, but I'd hardly call it a bed."

"I am tasteful," he muttered, and sighed. "A-jie wanted to have you with her, but no one thought it was a good idea to keep you at Koi Tower."

"Eh, they could've done with my handsome visage lighting the place up," Wei Wuxian said with a shrug, and grinned at Lan Wangji. "Don't you agree?" he asked, innocently.

"It would have been an improvement," Lan Wangji agreed, at the same time that Jiang Cheng gave a definitive, "No."

His attention was caught by movement on the river, and the expression Jiang Cheng made upon Lan Wangji's statement was eclipsed by a glad smile.

Wei Wuxian turned to look at what had diverted him, and fell silent. On the bow of a golden coloured barge, a woman in robes of lavender stood outlined like a figurehead. Keen eyes peered from a serene face, which broke into a smile as she spotted her welcome party.

Before the boat was even secured she had leapt from her position, onto the dock, and into Wei Wuxian's arms. He stumbled slightly. But there were many hands at his back to steady him.

Wei Wuxian didn't even notice them - it was all he could to hold on to Jiang Yanli, repeating, over and over, "Shijie, shijie, shijie," as she did the same, repeating, over and over, "A-Xian, Xianxian, Xianxian, a-Xian."

He buried his face in her hair, uncaring on its habitual tidiness or of her elegant hairpiece. She clutched the back of his neck in turn, uncaring of the unusual neatness of his hair.

They clung to each other, and rocked. It was a long time before either of them could bring themselves to let go, and when they did, they each kept a hold of the other's arm. Jiang Yanli reached out her free hand, and gently wiped away a tear, gleaming in the sunlight, from his cheek.

“Oh, a-Xian,” she said. “Thirteen years is a long time to wait to say thank you.”

“Thirteen years is a long time to make you wait for an apology,” he whispered in reply.

She shook her head. “No. No apology.”

“I was the reason you —!”

“No,” she interrupted. “You do not need to apologise to me.”

She looked him in the eyes, her own serious and dark. “I have mourned you, and I have missed you,” she said, her voice clear and firm. “Before you were even transformed to silver, I missed you. You saved my husband, and you saved myself, and you made mistakes, as I did, and others did too. You do not need to apologise to me.”

“Let me,” he entreated, eyes wet. “Please, I, you, you didn’t deserve that, and it was my fault, I need —”

She shushed him, and pulled him into another gentle hug. “You can apologise,” she whispered. “But only if you let me thank you.”

“I’m sorry,” he murmured back, brokenly. “I’m so sorry.”

“Thank you,” she breathed with him. “Thank you for my husband, for my life, for my children. Thank you.”

“You didn’t deserve to go through that, that trauma, you didn’t deserve it.”

“Neither did you,” she promised, and rocked him as she did her children when they cried. Her own tears shone like pearls in the sunlight, but the smile on her face was brighter.

Chapter End Notes

One chapter to go 😬

as always

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Eventually, the siblings managed to stop crying long enough to break away. Wei Wuxian gave her a shaky smile as he rubbed his eye with the heel of his palm.

“I know you always babied us two,” he said, his eyes darting over to Jiang Cheng, who was talking loudly with a teenager who looked a little too much like Jin Zixuan. “But official motherhood seems to have been good for you.”

“You and a-Cheng gave me quite a few greys,” she said seriously, though with a twinkle in her eyes. “But my children are going to turn my hair entirely white.”

Wei Wuxian laughed, and a voice from behind him spoke. “Even then, you’ll still be just as beautiful as the day I married you.”

Jin Zixuan came into view, and kissed the top of Jiang Yanli’s head. “Have you told him off yet?” he asked her, then looked at Wei Wuxian. He jumped, and cursed.

“By the Charter, I had forgotten you would still be twenty-three,” he exclaimed. “I thought I was so ancient at that age, but wow. You still look like a child.”

“At least I don’t have wrinkles,” Wei Wuxian retorted, restraining himself, very maturely in his opinion, from sticking his tongue out at him.

Jin Zixuan turned to his wife with a mildly panicked look on his face. “I don’t have wrinkles, do I, a-Li?” he asked in a rush.

She bit her lip to keep from smiling. “They make you look distinguished,” she said, and kissed his knuckles before looking behind him. Her eyes widened.

“Excuse me,” she said, and ran past them, calling as she did, “A-Ji, put that down!”

Jin Zixuan watched her go. “Kids, right?” he said to Wei Wuxian a little awkwardly, and Wei Wuxian, who had once been the primary guardian of a child in a crumbling city of corpses, nodded in understanding.

“Not sure if I ever got to mention this,” he continued. “But, uh. I did try and stop my father. From the raid, on the Burial Mound.” He rubbed the back of his neck, resolutely looking out over the water. “But I was still recovering from, you know. Anyway. He didn’t tell me what he was doing, and there wasn’t much I could do anyway. But for what it’s worth, I am sorry.”

“Well,” Wei Wuxian said, taken aback. “It, I. There can be nothing to forgive, after what happened to you, after what I did, but. I never would have blamed you, anyway.”

“Right, yeah. Glad we - anyway. Glad you’re back,” he said, gruffly. “For a-Li.”

“Yeah, glad you didn’t... anyway. Thanks.”

To Wei Wuxian’s immense relief, they were both rescued from any further conversation.

“A-Xian, come and meet your nephew and nieces!” Jiang Yanli said, grabbing his arm and towing him away.

“Wait, I only have one nephew?” Wei Wuxian asked, grinning, feeling slightly dazed from happiness.

“You have one nephew, and four nieces,” she informed him.

“Wow, how is that even possible?”

“I don’t know, but whoever claimed that girls were easy to raise had never done so, these girls will be the death of me,” she said, but her eyes sparkled with fondness and love.

Wei Wuxian took a moment to drink in the sight of her. Her husband had been right to say she was just as beautiful as she had been thirteen years ago, but there were changes. She had more colour about her, skin golden after the deathly pallor she had worn when last he’d seen her. Laugh lines ringed her eyes, worry and grief lined her mouth, concern, her brow.

She lived, Wei Wuxian thought to himself in something like astonishment. He had not quite believed it since he had woken up without her there. Not until he saw her, still and regal, on the bow. *She got to live*.

Jin Ling, the nephew Wei Wuxian had gotten to name, was talking to Jiang Cheng. He looked at Wei Wuxian with uncomfortable intensity after they were introduced, before saying, “If you’re my uncle, where have you been all my life?” and turning his nose up.

Jin Zixuan began to scold him for his impoliteness, but Wei Wuxian just laughed. “You’re exactly like your father used to be,” he said cheerfully, ignoring the offended looks both father and son directed at him.

“I guess... thanks for the bell,” Jin Ling said reluctantly, after his mother gave him a pointed look.

“The bell?” Wei Wuxian blinked at him, before his eyes widened. “You got the bell?”

“I found it in my hand, when they brought me back to Koi Tower, after, you know,” Jin Zixuan said. “I wasn’t sure how it had gotten there, but. I figured it, something that powerful, was from you.”

“For Jin Ling,” Wei Wuxian said, and tried not to tear up again.

“It’s been useful,” Jin Ling said, and looked awkward. “It, uh, it’s kept me safe.”

Wei Wuxian looked at him seriously for a long moment before he smiled. “I’m glad.”

The nieces had already scattered to the winds of Lotus Pier, but Jiang Yanli managed to find one, the youngest at five. She looked up at Wei Wuxian with dancing eyes, and her mother's sweet smile.

"If you're my uncle, then you need to give me sweets," she informed him, and he gave another laugh as he bent down to ruffle her hair. She laughed as well, and ducked out of reach.

"I'm all out," he said, heart full to bursting. "But I'll try and get some for you soon."

"Promise?" she asked brightly.

"Promise," he said, a solemn look on his face, that broke to join hers as she giggled. Then she whooped, and, before her mother could catch her, ran off to join one of her sisters.

"A-Ji is my little con-artist," Jiang Yanli said fondly. "She's the baby, so she knows how to use those puppy eyes of hers."

"I'll have to teach her all my tricks!" Wei Wuxian said with laugh, and linked his arm with hers. "Now. Tell me about them."

As they walked along the pier, arm in arm, Wei Wuxian looked over, and caught Lan Wangji's eye. He was talking with Wen Sizhui and Lan Jingyi, and stayed where he was. But he nodded back, eyes soft and bright, his robes the pale blue of a still pond, shining brilliant in the sunlight.

Wei Wuxian kept walking, but blew him a quick kiss. He turned back to Jiang Yanli before he saw Lan Wangji's reaction, grinning.

"What's that look for?" she asked, in the middle of her exposé on Jin Ling's archery.

"Lan Zhan," he said by way of explanation.

"Ah," she said in a tone of enlightenment, and they grinned at each other.

They wove in and out of the people on the street. Many recognised Jiang Yanli, and gave her respectful greetings. Most of them overlooked the man at her side, or gave him the puzzled look of one who finds someone else almost familiar. It was only when they were past, the man's loud descriptions of Lan Wangji trailing behind him, when the two figures were backlit by the orange filter of the setting sun, the haze around them like the glow of Charter Magic, when the man exploded in a gleeful peal of laughter, and Jiang Yanli joined in, that they blinked, and recognised him.

"By the Charter," most muttered, touching their own Charter mark briefly with two fingers. But most, looking after them, also smiled, a wondering sort of smile, and wished them well.

It was some time before Wei Wuxian managed to come across Nie Huaisang again.

Quite a few people looked like they wanted to have a word with her, when she showed up at Lotus Pier during a banquet, as casually as if she'd never left in the first place.

Wei Wuxian made it to her first.

"Oh, Wei-xiong, hello there," she said, fluttering her fan in front of her face. "You're looking... less silver."

"A mystery, as to why," he said with a tight smile.

"Mm, yes, what can that boy have been thinking, hm?"

"I'd appreciate if you'd just tell me why. Why you, why then."

She gave a coquettish smile. "You're wondering if I'll cash in on the debt, soon?"

"Wondering why you needed me, specifically, to pay that debt."

"Hm, well," she began, as if she was going to dance around the topic forever. He shot her look, and she gave in with a roll of her eyes, allowing a slight edge of frustration to leak into her voice.

"To be perfectly honest, it's all been rather disastrous on my end," she said, waving her fan faster.

"Oh? Why? You got me back."

"Ah, but the future I saw with you in it, it's... well, I, again, to be honest, completely fucked up, and now you're near useless to me."

"Um. What?"

"In one the futures I saw," she clarified, "you were the one who went to all the trouble of investigating the death of my brother, and eventually found and brought his killer to justice."

"Huh," Wei Wuxian said, completely flummoxed. "Do, do you want me to... still do that?"

She waved her hand around airily. "Unfortunately, there's very little chance of that working, in this version of the present. Everything got messed around because I didn't account for the where and when you would wake up."

"Um," he said. "Sorry?"

She rolled her eyes. "Just remember in the future that taking Life-force will allow you to transition easier into Life, okay?"

"I, uh, already knew that." *Is she talking about Mo Xuanyu's Life-force? Does she realise how fucked up that is?*

“Of course, yes, you would,” she said, and fanned herself distractedly. “Anyway, I’ll come up with some other plan, since I think your involvement will just make things messier at this point.”

“Good luck with that.”

“Thank you. Oh, and if I ever happen to find the corpse of my brother that has been magically preserved and enslaved, you’d be a dear and help free him, right?”

Wei Wuxian could feel his eyebrows disappear into his bangs. “Uh, okay, but are you sure you don’t want help on this investigation? And will the whole... anyway, will that be the completion of whatever debt there is between us?”

“No, and yes. It’ll be fine,” she said, beginning to walk away. “I’m working on it. Honestly, everything will probably work out even better than my plan involving you.” And she disappeared into the crowd.

"Well, that's good, I guess," Wei Wuxian muttered to empty air, and went to find Lan Wangji and another drink.

“Is all well?” Lan Wangji asked, as Wei Wuxian leaned comfortably into his chest. His eyes were on Nie Huaisang as Jiang Cheng tried and failed to corner her, but Wei Wuxian’s eyes were closed.

“It’s fine, or it will be,” he said. He kissed him, before looking around the room. Wen Qing in her bright red robes, her arm around the waist of a round-faced woman who looked vaguely familiar, caught his eye and gave him a sharp grin.

Jiang Yanli sat close to them, and leaned against her husband drowsily, her youngest already asleep in her lap.

Jiang Cheng and Wen Ning were having a discussion with the rest of her daughters, which was making very little sense, but did not lack for enthusiasm.

Mo Xuanyu and Jin Ling were talking with the Lan disciples. Jin Ling seemed unable, however, to keep himself from interrupting his sibling’s discussion whenever he thought they were saying something particularly stupid.

“Honestly, it’s actually kind of nice,” Wei Wuxian said, tucking his head comfortably over Lan Wangji’s shoulder, like he wanted to begin dancing.

“What is?” Lan Wangji asked.

“To know that this is not the end. There are so many more things to do, magic to create and to study, mysteries to investigate, people to help. People to love.”

“People to love you,” Lan Wangji said into Wei Wuxian’s ear. Wei Wuxian smiled over his shoulder, to the room full of people who he loved and who loved him. Lan Wangji, hidden against Wei Wuxian hair, smiled too.

Wei Wuxian began to sway, unable, as always, to stand still, and Lan Wangji, as always, followed suit, and swayed with him.

Chapter End Notes

And that's a wrap! In case it wasn't clear, the future Nie Huaisang Saw would've been quite close to canon - Wei Wuxian would have turned up in Mo Village, and, if Mo Xuanyu died, Wei Wuxian would've woken quickly with the help of his Life. However, things didn't happen that way, phew, so we got this timeline!

Though I very much doubt whether Wei Wuxian will be able to keep himself from getting involved in the whole mystery in the future. Ah, well, something for him to look forward to! If you have any questions about other events that happen in the future of this universe, or about things that you didn't quite understand, or anything about the worldbuilding, please feel free to ask in the comments, or send me a message on my tumblr. Even if you don't have a question, feel free to come say hi!

I just wanted to thank everyone that commented, especially those that commented more than once, or that commented on almost! every! single! chapter! as they came out. I literally love you guys more than Life, and have cried from more than one of those comments, you are all so incredible. But even if you're just reading this now it's completed (I get it, I do the same thing), I'm genuinely so happy that you decided to read, and that you hopefully loved reading *hold me closer, necromancer* as much as I loved writing it!

Please leave comments or kudos if you enjoyed, and to those that already have, well, I can only say:

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!